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Postponed, monuments in the Netherlands

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Postponed monuments in the Netherlands

Manifestation, context, and meaning

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan Tilburg University
op gezag van de rector magnificus,
prof. dr. Ph. Eijlander,
in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van een
door het college voor promoties aangewezen commissie
in de aula van de Universiteit

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For Aloy

*...and life is just a simple game...*¹

¹ From the song 'A simple game' (1968) by the British rock group The Moody Blues.

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Preface

How totally wrong the words ‘...and life is just a simple game...’ are if you live your life with the burden of a traumatic experience from the past, which you are unable to discuss with others and which leaves you no peace of mind.

We now live in a society where there is more room and attention for histories from the past and memory culture is very much alive and ‘booming business’. Immediately after dramatic events, we stand up and around the victims and their relatives and offer them any help that is required. We organize commemoration rituals at different times and places with the objective of helping the victims in coming to terms with the loss, and maybe also to express our own emotions. There are no taboos and we invite people to share their emotions in the public area.

How different this was for the participants in my research when they experienced horrible things like the internment in a concentration camp in the Second World War, or loss of family during the Shoah, the loss of a stillborn child, or when they were involved in the worst train collision ever in the Netherlands. At the time it was thought best not to pay too much attention to emotional affairs and to continue ‘business as usual’. That should be the way to get over your loss: ‘life is just a simple game’. But for some it appeared to be not that easy.

This research has a focus on precisely those people and their bonding with a public monument which was erected long time after and in memory of the emotional events. Commemoration rituals at the site of these so called ‘postponed’ monuments apparently help people in bringing their experiences out in the open, and, for some, this appeared to be beneficial. And the song continues...

Thoughts of another day
Flashing through my head
Thinking how life could be
[...]
Be what we want to be
What we deserve to be
What we are meant to be

This song was one of the favourites of my father... born in 1921 and burdened a great deal of his life with the traumatic experiences of the Second World War. I know it was not so easy for him to live in accordance with the lyrics.

This book is written in remembrance of my father and as a tribute to my parents, Frits Faro and Ly Faro-Zevenbergen, who offered both my brothers and myself a happy and careless youth and a wonderful education.

But there is only one person to whom this book may be dedicated, as he is my true example of how to live your life ‘as a simple game’ but always with respect to all things that really matter and with endless, positive energy: my dearest friend and husband Alof Wiechmann. Each day at his site is a wonder...

There, by your side, I will be
When this crazy world is free
Free from doubt
When it finds out
Exactly what we’re meant to be
That we are one
We’re all the same
And life is just a simple game.²

Laurie Faro
Gemonde, November 2014

² From the song ‘A simple game’ (1968) by the British rock group The Moody Blues.

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A special word of thanks to both my advisors in this research project: Paul Post and Rien van Uden. I realize that I did not always take the 'easy road' but thanks to your wise advice, this project has reached a 'happy landing'!

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Carine Zebedee transformed the manuscript into a book. I thank her (and her colleagues Karin Berkhout and Erna van Ballegoy) very much for all the hard work and support!

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I would like to express my gratitude to Ken Elgenia, in-pensioner of the Royal Hospital Chelsea in London³ who very carefully read my manuscript and advised me on the correct English.

In remembrance of our fine and impressive conversations, one of his poems:

³ 'The story of today's Royal Hospital Chelsea begins over 300 years ago in the reign of King Charles II. Aware that the army was supporting a growing number of soldiers who were no longer fit for active service, and inspired by Les Invalides in Paris, the king committed to create a welcoming and safe home for veterans who had fought for their country and who were now 'broken by age or war'. His vision for such a home was brought to life by Sir Christopher Wren, whose elegant buildings still stand majestically on the banks of the River Thames in the heart of 21st century London. But it's not just the buildings that have survived into modern times. Charles II's understanding that the country owes a debt of gratitude to its old soldiers informs the spirit of the Royal Hospital today. The residents of the Hospital, known the world over as Chelsea Pensioners, have all served as ordinary soldiers in the Armed Forces at some point in their lives, and now, in their later years, find a warm welcome amidst the camaraderie and banter of their fellow veterans.' Source: www.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk, accessed November 5, 2014.

Fire⁴

On a fine summers day
in the autumn time.
A friend and I by grand design,
Decided to visit a graveyard
in old Chelsea town.

Once inside not a Yew tree in sight,
it was this which gave me a little fright.
Nine thousand souls lay around our feet.
Then my heart jumped and missed a beat.
On two sides traffic thundered past,
but not inside our place of rest.

Trees sort derrieres, basalt trunks.
All planted calmly, deliberately.
Silhouetted hulks, all standing serenely.

Daytime brings each tree a fiery golden bowl,
in which a thousand salamanders swim,
a day in the life of a salamander is great,
so he's decided to change again.
The same animal is now a rug,
and lays over his host's green sharpened teeth.

The months roll on,
and she who bred the salamanders,
begins her long cannibalistic feast.

On leaving this hallowed ground,
I ask permission of my friend
“is it all right if I kiss her hand”?



⁴ In the ancient past, the pagan hunter gatherer would seek shelter in a grove of yew trees, after a day hunting. This was done to secure a safe night sleep. The Christian church adopted the pagan practice and planted yew trees in their church graveyards. This would give their dead a place of eternal rest (In-Pensioner Kenneth Elgenia, Royal Hospital Chelsea, London, November 3, 2014).

Chapter 1

Introduction

*There is nothing in the world as invisible as a monument*⁵

1.1 Introduction: grassroots memorials and postponed monuments

In the United States of America, at the final stage of the Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013, two bombs exploded. Three people were killed and hundreds were injured. The day after this terrorist attack, the sites of the bombings transformed into memorials. Flowers, notes and, not surprisingly, running shoes, turned the sites of suffering into makeshift and temporarily memorials. They became the focal point of silent marches, candle burning and other forms of public mourning and protest



Grassroots memorial Boston Marathon, April 2013
[picture Inez Schippers]

⁵ MUSIL: *Posthumous papers of a living author* 64.

against the violence of the attacks. This is not an unusual phenomenon. Nowadays sites of disaster and trauma turn, almost immediately after the incidents, into sites of mourning, remembering and honouring the victims. These so called ‘grassroots’ or ephemeral memorials have become a firmly recognized component of the current ritual repertoire after tragic incidents in public space.⁶

About six months before the Boston bombings, another type of memorial ritual took place at the site of a newly erected monument in Germany. On October 24, 2012, a monument to honour approximately 500,000 Sinti, and Roma murdered by the Nazis during the Second World War was inaugurated in Berlin. Sixty-seven years after the ending of the war, German Chancellor Merkel noted in her inaugural address that the monument was ‘as timely as ever’. The Sinti and Roma remain under threat and deserve support from Germany but also from other European countries. The importance of the monument cannot be overestimated because it commemorates a genocide which has been ignored for a long time, according to Chancellor Merkel.⁷



Sinti and Roma Monument Berlin
[Wikipedia.org]

The erection of this Sinti and Roma monument in Berlin, long time after the Second World War, serves as an example of a category of monuments which might be called: ‘postponed’ monuments.

⁶ MARGRY & SÁNCHEZ-CARRETERO (eds.): *Grassroots memorials*; SANTINO (ed.): *Spontaneous shrines and the public memorialization of death*; POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual*; STENGES: ‘Public practices of commemorative mourning’, 119-144.

⁷ www.despiegel.de/international/germany/monument-to-sinti-and-roma-murdered-in-the-Shoah-opens-in-berlin, accessed May 3, 2013.

The Berlin monument is not an exception. Nowadays a variety of events from the, sometimes suppressed or forgotten, past are recalled in memory by means of a public monument.

The core of these monuments lies in the apparent ‘need’ to create a public memorial place relating to persons or events from the past. Often these memorial places are the end of a process of obliteration, ignoring or suppressing and have the objective to capture a place in public memory.⁸

Although both grassroots memorials and postponed monuments belong to the ritual repertoire of commemoration, they diverge in several aspects.

Evidently, a first difference is related to the time span between the (tragic) event(s) and commemoration. In Boston, grassroots memorials appeared very soon after the attack, while it took sixty seven years after the ending of the Second World War to erect the Sinti and Roma monument in Berlin.

A second difference concerns the material appearance. Common elements of a grassroots memorial are, as said, flowers, notes and other mainly personal remembrances, all with a more or less temporarily character. In Berlin a monument, a permanent object of public art, was designed, erected and officially inaugurated.

In the field of ritual studies and in particular in studies on commemoration rituals, much attention is paid to the ritual component of grassroots memorials. There is an ongoing debate on origin, and meaning of these memorials. Less attention is paid to the question of form, ritual practices, and meaning of postponed monuments as a separate category. This project is an exploration, within the field of ritual studies of the phenomenon of postponed monuments in the Netherlands.

In this opening chapter, the background of this project, research questions, and research design will be presented. The scope of monument culture in the Netherlands nowadays is very wide, and seems, without limits. As an introduction, and illustration of the variety and diversity of Dutch monuments and to position the category of postponed monuments, an overview will be given of developments in general in Dutch monument culture. The central research question of this project will be explored throughout analysis of the results of four case studies. In these case studies, form, contexts, and ritual practices of postponed monuments will be researched with a focus on meaning of these monuments to individuals and groups of people involved. The case studies make up the empirical heart of this project.

⁸ FOOTE: Shadowed ground; FOOTE: ‘Shadowed ground, sacred place’, 93-119.

1.2 The panorama of monument culture in the Netherlands: the example of Amsterdam

In the current debate on the function and meaning of monuments in our culture, these words of the Austrian author Robert Musil (1880-1942) in his essay *Die Denkmäler*, are often cited in the discussion.⁹ The contemporary widespread public monument and memory culture seems to be in contradiction with Musil's statement, in particular if we consider the variety and diversity in monuments within public space: besides monuments to important people or 'heroes', there may be monuments relating, for example, to disasters, senseless violence, or to events from a repressed or ignored past. Today, there seems to be no limit to this enumeration.

In the following paragraphs, the panorama of today's monument culture in the Netherlands will be demonstrated with the aid of an outline of monument culture in Amsterdam, the Dutch capital, and a city with national allure. With a number of inhabitants close to 800,000, Amsterdam is the biggest city of the Netherlands.

During the Second World War, the city of Amsterdam was important in organization, and execution of resistance activities against the German occupation. After the war, monuments honouring members of the Resistance, but also other categories of war victims were erected in Amsterdam. Together with the Nationaal Monument on Dam Square, the national Second World War monument, this means that in Amsterdam a variety of forms and categories of Second World War monuments may be found.

Over time, the inhabitants of Amsterdam were confronted with several serious incidents and acts of violence. As part of memory culture and apart from the category of Second World War monuments, different categories and types of monuments were erected remembering these events and honouring the victims.

In this respect, Amsterdam will offer a general idea, but not a representative picture of Dutch monument culture. Below a sketch of its monuments will be given as an exploration and illustration of the scope and variety in today's monument culture. This overview is limited to monuments: forms of public art with in the first place a remembering function. I did not include tombstone monuments, which I consider to be a separate category, nor sculptures integrated into architecture, or plaques placed as *lieux de mémoire*.

In addition to an overview and positioning, the presence of postponed monuments will be investigated in order to conclude whether they may be considered as a separate and relevant category.

The selection of monuments was made chronologically: starting around the end of the nineteenth century when Dutch monument culture took a slow start. Each decade has been explored for new developments in categories and types in monument culture.

⁹ MUSIL: *Posthumous papers of a living author* 64.

Rembrandt (1852, Rembrandtplein) and Vondel (1867, Vondelpark)

One of the most prominent public statues with a ‘remembering’ function was erected in the nineteenth century in Amsterdam: the Rembrandt statue (1852). This statue was designed and created by the Flemish sculptor Louis Royer (1793-1868). The initiative for this statue was already taken in 1840. In that year, the city of Antwerp had a statue unveiled dedicated to the great Flemish painter Rubens, and voices were heard in Amsterdam that their own most famous painter Rembrandt deserved the same honour. Due to political agitation around the year 1848, and because funds had to be raised for the monument, it was only in 1852 that the statue was unveiled. The statue was put at the north side of the Botermarkt, in the centre of Amsterdam. In 1876, the statue was moved to the centre of this square, and at the same time the Botermarkt was renamed Rembrandtplein.¹⁰

In 1867 a statue in remembrance of the famous poet Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) was erected in a public park, the Nieuwe Park which was consequently renamed Vondelpark. This statue was also created by Louis Royer. The objective of these postponed monuments was to use ‘heroes’ from a distant period in history to glorify our ‘beautiful country’, and to remember the general public of their honourable heroes, even long time after their death.

In both examples, monument and space become connected in naming the place of location of the monument after the event or person commemorated by the monument. The locations of the two examples have all been named after the person or the event that is remembered: Rembrandtplein and Vondelpark. In this way, a memorial space consisting of the monument and the place is created.

Van Heutsz Monument / Monument Nederland-Indië (1935, Olympiaplein)¹¹

This monument in honour of the Dutch-Indië army commander Van Heutsz (1851-1924) was designed and created by Dutch sculptor Frits van Hall (1899-1945). The monument was unveiled in 1935 and was much contested before its dedication. At an early time there was doubt whether the debatable role of the Dutch in their overseas colony in the East, the Dutch Indies, should be immortalized in a monument. The monument is a 4.5 meter high female figure symbolizing Dutch supremacy over the indigenous people. A portrait of General J.B van Heutsz used to be for a long time part of the monument but has been removed due to the disputable role of Van Heutsz. In contrast with the Rembrandt and Vondel monuments, Van Heutsz appeared to be the wrong symbol of a glorifying past of the Dutch in their overseas colony.

After long time discussions what to do with this monument representing a continuing disputable part of the Dutch history, it was decided in 2000 to change the name of the monument to: Monument Indië-Nederland. It was decided that the function of the monument in the future would be not to honour but to keep the discussion about the role of the Dutch in their colony alive and in this respect continue in confronting the Dutch in public space with their past.

¹⁰ SPRUIJT (red.): *Het Amsterdams beeldenboek* 12.

¹¹ [www.geschiedenis24.nl/andere tijden/afleveringen/1999-2000/Van-Heutsz.html](http://www.geschiedenis24.nl/andere_tijden/afleveringen/1999-2000/Van-Heutsz.html), accessed March 20, 2013.

What may be concluded out of the developments around this monument is that monuments are not 'static' in dedication and that instead of removing them, as was done with, for instance, statues of Lenin and Stalin¹² during the Soviet Union period, or topple them down as was done with the statues of Saddam Hussein¹³ after his fall in 2003, they may be given a new dedication.

Events or persons represented by monuments may be contested at a later moment in time due to changes in perspectives on history. If a monument is understood as a medium of 'honouring' or 'glorifying' an event, a period in history or a person, as was often the case with political monuments in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and opinions change, the question will have to be answered what action to take regarding the monument: topple down, ignore, that is 'forget', or give the monument a new destination as was the case with the Van Heutsz Monument. In this particular case the choice was made to retain the monument at a public space and rename it thus shifting the focus from General Van Heutsz to Nederlands-Indië, the name of the colony. The transformation was also related to the function of the monument: it is now intended to remember the relation between the Netherlands and their colony Nederlands-Indië in all aspects, either positive or negative.

Monument Wilhelmina Drucker (1939, Churchillaan)¹⁴

Four years later, a monument made by the Dutch sculptor Gerrit van der Veen (1902-1944) to honour a Dutch feminist, Wilhelmina Drucker (1847-1925), was unveiled. The monument depicts a young woman with her hands up in the air symbolizing a woman as 'a free man', ready for a new future ahead of her. The initiative for this monument was taken by nine women who feared that, due to the economic crisis of the thirties, women's rights would be jeopardized again. The monument and the historical person of Wilhelmina Drucker became a symbol in the struggle to protect female's rights at a time of economic depression.

During the so called 'second feminist wave', the resurrection of feminism during the 1960s-1980s, female actionists called Dolle Mina ('Crazy Mina', referring to Wilhelmina Drucker) used the monument as a place of protest. The person represented in the monument acts as a symbol for this group of Dutch feminists. On January 23, 1970, a public burning of female corsets was organized at the monument in protest of discrimination of women.

It is interesting that at the same time this monument and its memorial space are a place of protest and a place of emancipation of a group of people, in this case Dutch feminists. The remembering function of the monument is relegated to the second place and the protest function to the first. Other monuments, as will be illustrated later on in this overview, may also acquire this second function.

¹² MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 143-153.

¹³ GÖTTKE: *Toppled*.

¹⁴ SPRUIJT (red.): *Het Amsterdams beeldenboek* 42.

*Keesje (1945, Keesje Brijdeplantsoen, Sporenburg)*¹⁵

Already during, but in particular after the Second World War, monuments were erected remembering different kind of events and persons related to the war, as will be shown here after.

A remarkable example in this respect forms a simple monument named after the boy eternalized: Keesje.

Immediately after the Second World War, two members of the Dutch resistance put a small wooden cross at a railway yard in Amsterdam near Sporenburg at the place where a Dutch 12 year old schoolboy was killed in 1944. During the so called *Hongerwinter* (period of starvation during the winter of 1944-1945) Keesje Brijde was collecting wood at this railway yard to stoke at the family's home fire and thus help his family. The Germans did not allow this and he was shot at the railway yard. To honour this small and maybe insignificant death, a simple wooden cross marks the place where he was shot. Ever since that time, the little monument has been honoured and respected by local inhabitants and railway personnel. In the year 2000, the monument had to be moved because of the construction of a new tunnel. It has now an honourable place and its own little park called the Keesje Brijdeplantsoen.

This monument is an (early) example of the so called 'democratization' of monuments: not only historically important people and events are honoured in monuments, but also ordinary people, signifying and symbolizing innocence and injustice.

*Dokwerker (1952, Jonas Daniël Meijerplein)*¹⁶

A next example of this democratization and depicting of ordinary civilians in war monuments is the Dokwerker, symbolizing a worker of the (harbour) dockyards in protest. This monument was designed by probably the most famous Dutch sculptor of war monuments, Mari Andriessen (1897-1979), and erected in remembrance of the strike which was held by the citizens of Amsterdam on February 25, 1941, in protest of the German occupation.¹⁷ After the war, Queen Wilhelmina awarded the city of Amsterdam with the maxim: *Heldhaftig, vastberaden, barmhartig* (Heroic, determined, compassionate), thereby also honouring the acts of the Dutch resistance. Ever since the unveiling of the monument in 1952, yearly commemorations are held at this monument and the monument has been a symbol of solidarity and a general protest against injustice and discrimination. Like the Wilhelmina Drucker monument, this monument also has a 'protest' function. However, as the yearly commemorations continue, the remembering function acts as strong as the 'protest' function of the monument.

¹⁵ www.geheugenvanoost.nl/45359/nl/keesje-brijdeplantsoen, accessed March 20, 2013.

¹⁶ MOOI: *De strijd om de Februaristaking* 26-65; TILANUS: *De beeldhouwer Mari Andriessen* 75-86.

¹⁷ TILANUS: *De beeldhouwer Mari Andriessen* 78-86.

*Nationaal Monument (1956, Dam Square)*¹⁸

Immediately after the war, the idea was raised to erect nationwide coordinated ‘national’ monuments to remember the victims of the Second World War. The national monument in the centre of Amsterdam may be called the principal Second World War monument of the Netherlands because it is the focus of the yearly national commemoration of war victims on the 4th of May.

Already in 1948 the first design was made by the Dutch sculptor and painter John Rädecker (1885-1956). The final design was made together with a Dutch architect Jacobus Oud (1890-1963). The monument forms an integration of architecture and sculpture, with a 22 meter high pylon in the middle of the Dam, the centre and a focal point in Amsterdam, with the Royal Palace and a big church, the Nieuwe Kerk. The monument has also been a place of protest during the ‘swinging sixties’ of the 20th century when protesters, namely hippies, were ‘camping’ for weeks at the monument (the so called *Damslapers*). They were finally removed by military forces who took on their own the initiative for this action. This anarchistic action caused a lot of discussion afterwards.

Once a year, during the national commemoration of war victims, the Dam is transformed into a memorial place to remember and honour victims of war. At other days of the year, the monument may go unnoticed by dwellers, tourists or shoppers who use the steps and pedestal of the monument for leisure. It may seem as if the remembering and commemorating function of the monument is only relevant once a year on the 4th of May at eight o’clock at night during the commemoration ceremony, and during the two minutes of silence in respect of the war victims.

The last three (Second World War) monuments discussed show that a simple cross, like the Keesje monument may be erected without delay, while the process of erecting a monument as an object of public art, like the Dokwerker or the Nationaal Monument, apparently takes much more time. Postponement may be caused by discussion about the choice of artist, place of the monument, debates on form and symbolism and there may be an issue of funding.

*Het Amsterdamse Lieverdje (‘sweet little boy’) (1960, Spui)*¹⁹

This statue, symbolizing an ordinary Amsterdam street boy, designed by the Dutch sculptor Carel Kneulman (1915-2008), became in the 1960s the symbol for protest against establishment. At the monument action groups like Dolle Mina and Provo gathered for protest manifestations. The monument was sponsored by a cigarette company. One of the forerunners of the Provos, Robert Jan Grootveld, protested against smoking during regular ceremonies at the monument. He became famous with his ludic and playful actions, like the so called white bicycles plan (bicycles as a form of collective property) and the floating gardens in the Amsterdam canals.

This simple monument to remember ordinary Amsterdam street boys was chosen as a starting point for big plans to make this world a better place to live in as stated by Grootveld and later on other

¹⁸ Van GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 88-104; HJINK: *Voormalige concentratiekampen* 44-51.

¹⁹ SPRUIJT (red.): *Het Amsterdams beeldenboek* 66.

protesting groups like the Provos. Like the Wilhelmina Drucker monument, the Lieverdje was not only a place to protest, but also a place where groups found inspiration, ambitions and visions.

Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück (1975, Museumplein)²⁰

This Second World War monument was erected in 1975 to remember the victims of concentration camp Ravensbrück and also as a protest against fascism. It was raised 30 years after the Second World War ended. In this respect, the monument is an obvious example of a postponed monument. The design is a combination of abstract form, sound, and light.

This monument is of interest because at that time, during the mid-1970s, the design was very much *avant garde* and very different from other war monuments which had been erected until that moment. The committee of former prisoners made a remarkable choice with this design for their monument. The monument was designed by three artists (Guido Eckhardt, Frank Nix, and Joost van Santen) and will be extensively discussed hereafter in the case study on the Ravensbrück monument.

Monument voor de Stad Amsterdam (1977, Bijlmermeer)

This monument was designed by Pieter Engels (1938) and is only partly visible. One part of the monument, consisting of a stainless steel box with 17 compartments, has been buried into the earth. Within the boxes the artist put all kind of articles providing information on the city of Amsterdam in the year 1977, like samples of water from the Amsterdam canals, samples of Amsterdam air, but also newspapers, a tape recorder with radio recordings, and a deposit book with 100 guilders. The objective of the artist is that the boxes will be opened 500 years later, in 2477. The monument must be seen as a greeting to the citizens of Amsterdam in 2477 as may be read from the text on the granite tombstone like cover which was put on top of the boxes: *Engels & Amsterdam 1977 groeten Amsterdam 2477*.²¹ At the moment the text on the monument, explaining the content and the objective of the monument, has been partly erased and it will probably be difficult in 2477 to define the exact meaning of the monument and its content.

Monument Vliegramp Tenerife (air disaster Tenerife) (1977, Begraafplaats Westgaarde)²²

On March 27, 1977, two Boeing 747 passenger aircrafts collided on the runway of the airport of Tenerife. One of the Boeings was a Dutch KLM airplane with 248 people aboard. Nobody of the Dutch airplane survived. The other plane was an American PanAm flight with 396 people aboard. 335 of them were killed. With 583 fatalities, this crash has been the deadliest accident in the history of aviation.

Most of the Dutch victims were buried at the Amsterdam Westgaarde cemetery. A simple monument in remembrance of the victims was erected at the cemetery. In 2007, 30 years after the disaster, on the

²⁰ www.ravensbruck.nl, accessed June 12, 2012.

²¹ www.buiteninbeeld.nl/Amsterdam_ZO/Monument_Amsterdam.htm, accessed October 9, 2013.

²² www.herdenking-tenerife.org.historie.php, accessed March 20, 2013.

initiative of the Foundation Relatives Victims Tenerife in Amsterdam, an international monument, also remembering the American victims, was raised on the isle of Tenerife, in the neighbourhood of the airport. This monument depicts a spiral staircase, named ‘Stairway to Heaven’ and symbolizes infinity. The monument was designed by the Dutch artist Rudi van de Wint (1942-2006). In an official, international ceremony this monument was dedicated on March 27, 2007.

Apparently, long time after the drama, relatives still felt the need to visit the place of the disaster and create a public statement of what happened at the place long time ago by means of a monument and accompanying text. The reasons for the need to make such a public statement will be explored in the case study on the Dutch Harmelen railway disaster monument. This monument was raised 50 years after the crash in 1962, in 2012. The crash took the life of 93 people and remains the biggest railroad crash in the Netherlands.

*Mama Baranka (1985, Vondelpark)*²³

Fifteen year old Kevin Duinmeijer, an Amsterdam boy with Dutch Antilles ancestors, died in Amsterdam on August 21, 1983, as a victim of so called ‘senseless violence’. He died as a result of an attack by a group of skinheads. It was assumed that he was attacked just because of his colour of skin and this should be labelled as an act of racism. However, the killer was only convicted for murder and it was judged by the court that there was not enough evidence to define this as an act of racism. His death caused an enormous indignation among Dutch people and Kerwin Duinmeijer became a symbol in the fight against racism and discrimination.

A monument in his respect was erected in 1985 in the Vondelpark by the Curaçao sculptor Nelson Carrilho. Maybe surprisingly, the sculptor did not depict Kevin but preferred to symbolize Mama Baranka (‘Mother Rock’). Baranka is an Antillean word meaning ‘rock’ and Mama Baranka is the symbol for ‘stubbornness’ and in particular stands for ‘strength’. Mama Baranka refers also to Mother Earth but since the earth in Curaçao mainly consists of rock, it is Mother Rock.

Every year, at August 20, a commemoration and manifestation against racism and pointless violence are organized.

This monument may be seen as one of the first in what may be called a new type or category of monuments: monuments dedicated to ‘senseless’ deaths. After 1985, many more senseless deaths have occurred and in many places, not only Amsterdam, monuments were erected with the objective to commemorate but also as a form of protest against these ‘undeserved’ deaths.²⁴

*Homomonument (1987, Westermarkt)*²⁵

At the end of the 1970s, inspired by recent monuments erected to honour Jewish and Gypsy war victims, a foundation with the specific objective to erect a national monument regarding homosexual

²³ www.kerwin.nl, accessed March 20, 2013.

²⁴ POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster Ritual* 67-72.

²⁵ www.homomonument.nl, accessed March 20, 2013.

people was established. The monument was designed by the Dutch artist and specialist in environmental design, Karin Daan (1944). At first, the idea was to remember and honour homosexual victims of the Second World War, and in this respect the monument would be a postponed monument. Although the design refers to the Second World War, it was decided that the monument should be a support for homosexual people in general, and not be restricted to Second World War victims. Its basic form is a triangle, made of pink granite stone, referring to the pink triangle piece of cloth homosexual prisoners of German concentration camps were forced to wear on their camp clothing during the Second World War. This stone triangle has been integrated into the pavement allowing daily traffic to pass by and over and thus symbolizing that homosexual people belong to ordinary daily life.

Interesting regarding this monument is the double objective of remembrance, and also the emancipation of a particular group. Its form and the integration of place and monument are also remarkable.

*Monument Vliegramp Zanderij (air disaster Zanderij) (1989, 's-Gravensandplein)*²⁶

On June 7, 1989, an airplane of the Surinam Air Lines (SLM) crashed at the Surinam airport of Zanderij. The plane had 187 passengers aboard. Only 11 of them survived the crash. Many of the passengers were Surinam-Dutch people on their way to visit relatives in Surinam. Also aboard was a Dutch soccer team called the Kleurrijk Elftal ('Colourful Team'). This team comprised players with a Surinam or Antillean background who used to play for Dutch professional soccer teams. Fourteen members of this team lost their lives in the crash.

Besides a monument which was erected in Surinam in honour of all victims and near the place of the accident, another monument was raised in Amsterdam. To honour and remember the members of the soccer team, the monument was placed in the neighbourhood of the local pub which was regularly visited by members of the team. This monument was designed by the Surinam artist Guillaume Lo A Njoe (1937) and consists of three abstract elements of aluminium. Aluminium is the most important raw material of Surinam. The trinity of the elements leaves an open space symbolizing the liberation of body and soul of the victims of the disaster.

A foundation was established which organizes every year a commemoration ceremony, not only to honour the soccer players, but all victims.

In the Netherlands, a yearly commemoration is held at the monument and organized by a foundation in which survivors and relatives of deceased help and support each other.

*Monument 'Bijlmerramp' ('Bijlmer crash') (1996, Bijlmermeer, Kruitberg, and Groeneveen)*²⁷

On October 4, 1992, a Boeing carrying cargo of the Israelian airline El Al, crashed on an apartment complex in the Amsterdam suburb Bijlmermeer. Forty-three people, inhabitants of the apartments and

²⁶ www.geheugenvanoost.nl/de-vergeten-ramp, accessed March 20, 2013.

²⁷ www.buitenbeeldinbeeld.nl/monumenten/index, accessed March 20, 2013.

the crew of the plane, were killed. Immediately after the crash, local people started a grassroots memorial around a tree: *De boom die alles zag, die niet kon wegrekken maar het wel heeft overleefd* ('The tree that saw everything, could not run away and witnessed everything'). Soon after the crash, in December 1992, a committee was set up with the objective to erect a permanent monument at the place of the spontaneous monument. The mayor of the city of Amsterdam at that time, Ed van Thijn, made a promise that there would be a permanent monument before the commemoration of the first anniversary of the disaster. Due to the many different cultural backgrounds of the people involved, it appeared to be difficult to reach an agreement on design of the monument. Finally it was decided that the grassroots tree would be integrated in the permanent monument and remain the focal point of commemoration. The monument was dedicated in 1996 and designed by the Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger (1932). It was intended to be an 'accumulating' monument: the tree is surrounded by a wall which may be used for memorabilia like flowers, notes, letters or cuddly toys. The tiles in the pavement around the tree were decorated by relatives of the victim.

Yearly commemorations take place on the anniversary of the disaster on October 4.

An interesting aspect regarding this monument is the development and integration of a grassroots memorial and a permanent monument. In this case, postponement was probably caused by disputes on design and form of the monument.

*Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden (National Monument Slavery History) (2002, Oosterpark)*²⁸

In 1998 a political discussion took place about the issue of raising a monument to remember the abolition of slavery by the Dutch government in 1863. Government agreed to finance a monument and the city of Amsterdam offered to 'host' the monument. A covenant in this respect was signed between government and the city of Amsterdam and a foundation was set up to participate in the erection of a monument. An interesting fact is that the word *Nationaal* (national) is embodied in the name of the monument.

The monument was designed by the Surinam artist Erwin de Vries (1929) and depicts a figurative group of people. This group of figures incorporates three parts symbolizing history, present, and future. The history of slavery is symbolized by a group of people still carrying chains, the yoke of slavery. The present is symbolized by people breaking through the wall of resistance and the future is symbolized by a figure with its hands high up in the air, the urge for freedom and a better future.

The official dedication ceremony took place on July 2, 2002, and caused a lot of discussion because citizens were not allowed to participate, only official guests with an invitation and again, people felt discriminated from what they felt was 'their' monument.

²⁸ www.ninsee.nl/nationaal-slavernijmonument, accessed March 20, 2013.

Every year, on July 2, a commemoration ceremony is held at the monument together with an impressive festival, called Ketikoti ('break the chains'). This festival has grown to be an important manifestation of the origins of the Afro-Dutch community in daily life in Amsterdam.²⁹

This monument may be seen as a belated recognition of the Dutch government of a much contested and debated part of Dutch history that is the period in which slavery was allowed. In this respect it may be called a postponed monument. This recognition resulted in a 'national' monument thereby indicating that the range and relevance of this monument are nationwide.

*Digital Jewish Monument and Community (2005 and 2010)*³⁰

As of April 2005, the Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historical Museum) in Amsterdam is hosting the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands. This 'virtual' monument is an internet monument dedicated to preserving the memory of all the men, women, and children who were persecuted as Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and did not survive the Shoah.³¹ In 2010, the Jewish Monument Community, an interactive website, was added to the monument. Both monument and community are virtual expansions to the plaque on which all the family names of the Dutch Shoah victims are engraved. This plaque is located in the Chapelle Ardente of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in Amsterdam.³² The during the Second World War Dutch Jewish families who were selected for deportation, were brought together in this theatre. From that point, their journey to the Nazi camps commenced. This new form of commemoration on the internet became possible 60 years after the Second World War had ended turning this monument into a postponed monument. The scope of this virtual monument goes beyond the city of Amsterdam but has its 'basis' in the so called Joods Historisch Kwartier (Jewish Historical Quarter), a cooperation of Jewish museums in Amsterdam. This digital monument and internet community will be explored more in detail in one of the case studies below.

*Belle (2007, Oudekerksplein)*³³

In 2007, a monument honouring prostitutes worldwide was unveiled in the centre of the so called Red Light District in Amsterdam. The monument was designed by the Dutch artist Els Rijerse (1949) and depicts a full-breasted woman standing in a doorway at the top of a small set of steps. 'Belle' as she is called, looks self-assuredly into the world. According to Mariska Majoor of the Prostitution Information Centre, who took the initiative to this monument, the objective is to pay respect to all people worldwide who earn their money in prostitution.³⁴

²⁹ www.ketikotiamsterdam.nl, accessed March 20, 2013.

³⁰ www.joodsmonument.nl, accessed March 20, 2013; www.communityjoodsmonument.nl, accessed March 20, 2013.

³¹ www.joodsmonument.nl, accessed March 20, 2013.

³² www.hollandscheschouwburg.nl, accessed March 20, 2013.

³³ www.buitenbeeldinbeeld.nl/monumenten/index, accessed March 20, 2013.

³⁴ www.dutchamsterdam.nl, accessed October 10, 2013.

A trend, which already started with the Homo Monument, has been continued with this monument. This trend relates to ‘special’ groups in our society for whom initiators hold the opinion that a monument should be erected to honour, remember, and support them.

1.3 Understanding developments in the Netherlands

1.3.1 Views on Amsterdam monument culture

A first observation may be that ever since the Second World War the erection of public monuments in Amsterdam has become a firmly established practice. With regard to the objective to erect a monument or its function, it can be stated that the range has become wider including all kind of events, ranging from war, political events to tragedies, and like air crashes, and acts of senseless violence. The monument may also act as a symbol and as a start for actions or campaigns.

If we look at the design of the monuments, the observation is that new forms, like combinations of art and space or virtual monuments, appeared. In the course of time, design and symbolism of the monument have changed. Developments have gone from figurative to abstract, from ‘high culture art’ to a more democratic, accessible and understandable design, and nowadays even resulting in so called ‘digital monuments’ on the internet.

Artists have expanded their views on visualization but at the same time there have also been developments regarding the location or the place of the monument. We have seen the relevance of the location of the monument in different varieties, like for instance the place ‘where it all happened’, the place of the neighbourhood of people involved, a place of protest or a central place of remembering and commemoration. The location of the monument appears to be vital and so is the use of the space around the monument.

A variety of initiators, ‘top down’ like government authorities, but also ‘bottom up’ like memory groups and individuals, took the initiative to erect a monument in that way including public monuments into their ritual repertoire of commemoration. The monument has consequently become a place for ritual practices.

1.3.2 A historical perspective

As we have seen, until the Second World War there were only a few public monuments in Amsterdam. This was the same in other parts of the Netherlands. After the Second World War, the number of monuments increased and their objective and function changed. To put these developments in perspective, a brief historical exploration of the function of public monuments in general will be presented in this paragraph.

Back in the Roman period, public sculptures like statues, but also triumphal arches and columns, were used for ‘imperial ideology’, and ‘official propaganda’.³⁵ These forms of material culture were created

³⁵ BARRAL I ALTET: ‘The Roman world’ 156.

with the objective to remember the public of, for example, a victory of one of their emperors or other great deeds. Material culture transformed into memorial culture and, for instance, public statues became monuments. The word ‘monument’ derives from the Latin word *monere*, which means ‘to remember’. People passing by the monument were consequently remembered of the glorious deeds, most of the times victories of war by their rulers.

A universally well-known monument in this respect is probably the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (176 AD) in Rome. The original of this statue is now on display in the Capitoline Museums in Rome while a replica stands on the Piazza del Campidoglio. Many imperial statues were melted down by following and conflicting regimes but this statue somehow survived. Most probably because in the Middle Ages it was thought, incorrectly, that the statue portrayed the Christian emperor Constantine.

Ever since the Roman period, monuments have had different ‘remembering’ functions and different designs. They can be seen on funeral tombs to remind the public of the deceased, they can be seen as public statues remembering great men or important victories, or as architectural constructions, for instance colons or arches of triumph.

1.3.3 *Statuomania and Denkmalkultur*

In his extensive work on public monuments, Polish born art historian Sergiusz Michalski states that the public monument began to evolve in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages in a ‘slow, gradual process, with the category becoming difficult to discern among monuments with sepulchral connotations or public decorative sculpture of the Renaissance and Baroque.’³⁶ Michalski puts his focus on monuments with the objective to convey a political message, and erected by political authorities. He calls this category of monuments ‘public political monuments’. The statue of Marcus Aurelius being an early example, they may be observed in public space ever since the Roman period.

Michalski starts his discussion on public monuments in the 19th century. At that time, ‘the urge to erect monuments to commemorate important personages or patriotic events and memories acquired a new (in both the ideological and numerical sense) dimension, moving beyond the limitations of individually conceived acts of homage.’³⁷ Michalski sets the apogee of the tradition at the end of the 19th century when the erecting of public monuments became an artistic, political, and social domain in its own right. The number of monuments continued to grow in the course of the 19th century but it was only in between 40 and 50 years before 1914, when the First World War started, that we could speak of a specific *Denkmalkultur*.³⁸

³⁶ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 8.

³⁷ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 8.

³⁸ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 9.

In Europe, in particular in France and Germany, these developments were very prominent as will be illustrated hereunder. To put developments in the Netherlands, which seem to contrast, in a European perspective, a brief sketch of these countries will be presented.

Republican France after 1871 was the first country in Europe with a so called *Denkmalkultur* or *statuomania*.³⁹ In particular in the capital of France, Paris, many public monuments were erected to honour the Third Republique. Michalski cites in this respect a French expert on Parisian public monuments, the historian Gustave Pessard. In his book *La Statuomanie Parisienne* (1912) Pessard makes mention of more than 900 statues in Paris. Opinions disagree on the exact number. According to Michalski, the number of public monuments erected in Paris during the Third Republic was closer to 200. However, critics agreed that too many were built and that they did not necessarily embellish the city.⁴⁰ This explains the somewhat negative term *statuomania*.

About 1900, the traditional form or design of the monument changed. The form was more democratized and the traditional pyramidal, towards the sky oriented, monument changed. Traditionally monuments were placed on high plinths, but now they were also placed at eye level. A first example of this type of monument forms *Les Bourgeois de Calais* (Burghers of Calais; 1889) by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917). Rodin wanted his viewers to be able to look at his monument from all sides. As a result, he created a new role for viewers as they were invited to share the emotions mediated through the sculptures by exclusion of a plinth or pedestal. The audience was able to look *les bourgeois* right in the eyes. The monument was also controversial because the burghers (civilians) were presented not as images of glory, but as ordinary people experiencing anguish and pain. The monument was commissioned by the city of Calais to commemorate the sacrifices of the burghers of the town during the Hundred Year War with England. As a consequence, the city would have liked Rodin to accentuate the heroic dimension but Rodin considered this dimension less important.⁴¹

In Germany, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the *Denkmalkultur* took a start with Ernst Von Bandel's (1800-1876) monument in the German Teutoburger Wald. The ancient tribal chief Armenius vanquished in the year 9 AD the Roman legions sent by August. His victory was seen as triumph of rural bravery over sophisticated Roman cosmopolitan culture. This gigantic (more than 60 meters in height) statue was unveiled in 1875 and reflected the changed national mood of a now unified country. In Germany this *Denkmalkultur* resulted also in an 'obsession' with Wilhelmine statues: hundreds of equestrian statues, standing statues, seated statues, busts, and towers appeared in public space. In almost every city in Germany an equestrian statue of the first emperor of Germany, Wilhelm I (1797-1888), was erected. Later on also chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) was immortalized by means of public monuments.⁴²

³⁹ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 9.

⁴⁰ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 44-45.

⁴¹ DELCLAUX: *Rodin. A brilliant life* 107.

⁴² MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 59-66.

The emergent nationalism at the beginning of the 19th century was in countries like Germany and France the cause of a tremendous amount of statues.

1.3.4 The Netherlands

It has been stated that, dissimilar from other European countries, the Netherlands was not a country of sculptures and monuments, it is suggested that this was due to the lack of ‘sun and stone’.⁴³ The Netherlands had been, until that time, primarily a country of painters, and not of sculptors. When in the middle of the 19th century, there was a wish to remember and honour the glorious period of the 17th century, the Dutch had to call upon sculptors from neighbouring countries to provide them with monuments, because no culture of sculpture had been developed.⁴⁴

This is probably one of the reasons why only a small number of statues and monuments were erected in the 19th century: the figure of about 35 is mentioned in this respect.⁴⁵ In most occasions, private parties took the initiative to erect these monuments. Government parties were not actively involved at that time.

Another relevant aspect may be the important presence of protestant religion in Dutch culture, which did not allow visual culture in comparison with Roman Catholic religion. Although the Netherlands formed one nation state with a primacy on protestant religion, the Roman Catholic religion dominated in the southern provinces. Material culture was well accepted in this religion and was used as a mean to turn the public space, which was meant to be neutral, into a sacralized catholic space. Although for a long time processions and other manifestations of this religion were officially forbidden in public space, religious monuments dominated the landscape of the southern part of the country.⁴⁶ The northern part of the country with a protestant signature, lacked this material culture of so called ‘devotional monuments’ like road crosses, statues of Jesus Christ and his mother Mary, road side chapels, and devotional parks.⁴⁷ The Netherlands may be divided in a northern part and a southern part and as a dividing ‘line’ the rivers crossing the countries from east to west may be seen. In 1937, the Moerdijk bridges were built and they were perceived as a sort of entrance into the catholic part of the country. Upon crossing the bridge and entering the province of Noord-Brabant, visitors were welcomed by a statue of the Holy Virgin Mary and her boy child Jesus. The statue was placed high in the sky, in a tower with a height of ten meters and was shaped by the Dutch sculptor Manus Evers (1903-1981). In this way, visitors were ‘warned’ that they were entering the catholic part of the country. In later times, the statue had to be replaced due to reconstruction of the motor way and lost its function as a boundary between the protestant north and the catholic south.⁴⁸

⁴³ MIDDELHOFF: ‘1793 – Louis Royer – 1993’ 3-7.

⁴⁴ The *Rembrandt* and *Vondel* monuments may serve as an example.

⁴⁵ SPRUIJT (red.): *Het Amsterdams beeldenboek* 12; VAN DER WAL: ‘Nederlandse beeldhouwkunst’ 22-29.

⁴⁶ MARGRY: *Teedere quaesties: religieuze rituelen in conflict*; DE ROOY: *Openbaring en openbaarheid* 27.

⁴⁷ NISSEN & SWINKELS (red.): *Monumenten van vroomheid*; MARGRY: *Teedere quaesties: religieuze rituelen in conflict*.

⁴⁸ www.mariakapellen.nl/moerdijk.htm, accessed May 27, 2013.

1.3.5 The caesura of the First World War

In 1914, the Greek-Italian avant-gardist painter Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) completed his work 'The enigma of a day'. According to Michalski, De Chirico made in this painting reference to a possible 'demise' of the heroic public figural monument: 'The public figural monument whose demise the prophetic De Chirico was sensing, was one of the favourite elements of 19th-century culture.'⁴⁹

In the centre of 'The enigma of a day' appears a typical 19th century *statue d'un grand homme*. The area in front of the statue is 'uncomfortably' empty, there is no viewer to be seen, and the statue seems out of place and out of time. The painting could be symbolizing a 'crisis of the statue' which could refer to a crisis of the public monument, according to Michalski.

In that same year, 1914, the First World War took a start. When Germany's defeat was declared in the Treaty of Versailles in 1918, this appeared to be one of the deadliest conflicts in history until that time. In almost every town or village of countries which had been at war, civilians were mourning their deaths. This gave rise to a monument culture with a totally different character than the *Denkmalkultur* described above. Due to the big losses of human lives, there was no place for heroic figural monuments, glorifying victories, or the deeds of army leaders. In this respect Michalski's remarks about the demise of the public figural monument are correct. This monument culture comprised other new elements respecting ordinary civilians and not their leaders. A new form is for example 'The tomb of the unknown soldier'.⁵⁰ A first example of this type of monument is located in Paris, under the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile, and was unveiled at the second anniversary of the Armistice on November 11, 1920. A second example, in a different form, is the Cenotaph located at Whitehall, London. This war monument was designed by the British architect Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) and symbolizes an empty tomb, erected to honour people whose remains are elsewhere, for instance on the war cemeteries in France, near the places of the battlefields. Another new element is the symbol of the eternal flame to commemorate and honour the victims referring to the Old Testament. In the book Leviticus it is stated that 'the fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out.'⁵¹

Both monuments are the sites of the yearly commemorations of the Armistice, signed on November 11, 1918. These yearly ritual ceremonies held in commemoration of the victims also form a new element in memorial culture. Not only at these national monuments, but also at local monuments yearly commemorations are held up until today.

The First World War meant a caesura in monument culture resulting in a process of democratization of the monument: civilians, ordinary soldiers were honoured and mourned for instead of their country and army leaders. According to Winter, two motives prevail in this respect: the nobility of the warrior and bereavement.⁵²

⁴⁹ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 7.

⁵⁰ MOSSE: *Fallen soldiers* 94-98.

⁵¹ Leviticus 6:13.

⁵² WINTER: *Sites of memory, sites of mourning* 85.

The Netherlands had been a neutral party in the First World War. As a consequence, this war was not a prominent thematic part in Dutch monument sculpture. In comparison with combating countries, relatively few monuments were erected dedicated to this war. Two prominent examples may be mentioned in this respect.

The Marinemonument (1922) by the Dutch sculptor Gerard van Lom (1872-1953) in the city of Den Helder was erected to honour 58 marine soldiers who lost their life during the period of mobilization of the Dutch army. About a million Belgian civilians and about 30 thousands of Belgian soldiers took refuge during the war in the Netherlands. To express gratitude and remember Dutch hospitality, the Belgian architect Huib Hoste (1881-1957) was asked by the Belgian government to design a monument. This monument was erected in the city of Amersfoort because many Belgian soldiers were interned in a camp nearby. The official dedication took place in 1938. Another monument, a memorial plaque, was erected near Ede to remember 5300 refugees who were cared for in this city.

Although the Great War did not incite many monuments, other forms of art began to appear in public space in this period when public art became a component of urban development initiatives. For the first time, the government invested on a large scale in public statues and sculptures, and gave sculptors the commission to develop art for public purposes. In Amsterdam this gave rise to an integration of art in urban development, and statues with a commemorative function became a well-known phenomenon in public space. For example, the Dutch sculptor Hildo Krop (1884-1970) was asked to decorate newly built bridges in Amsterdam with sculptures. This decorating function of sculptures is a typical element of the architectural period Amsterdamse School (about 1915-1935).⁵³

1.3.6 War monuments after the Second World War

Immediately after, and even during the Second World War (for instance, a monument on the war cemetery on the Grebbeberg was dedicated in 1941), statues and monuments became part of the ritual repertoire to honour the victims and thus a ‘boost’ was given to monument culture. Up and until now, monuments are erected in remembrance of the victims and events during this war.⁵⁴ The theme and appearance of war monuments changed during the years. Immediately after the war, the focus of remembering was on the heroes of the resistance in the war and as a consequence monuments were erected in this respect. It took time to honour different categories of victims and events with monuments. As a result of the sometimes complicated aspects of remembering, a new type showed up: the so called ‘counter monuments’. These monuments are designed not only to commemorate the past, but also to encourage and provoke spectators to reflect on the process and tradition of commemoration itself. The artist has a strong influence with his design in this process.⁵⁵ This type, or form, of counter monument may also be seen in other categories of monuments and in this way an interrelationship

⁵³ KLEIJN, SMIT & THUNISSEN: *Nederlandse bouwkunst* 202-217.

⁵⁴ NATIONAAL COMITÉ 4 EN 5 MEI, WEITKAMP (red.): *Beleidsaandrijving beheer en behoud oorlogsmonumenten* 15.

⁵⁵ YOUNG: *The texture of memory* 27-48; CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory* 21.

between different categories of monuments may be observed. This form of monument was first developed in West Germany, which had a very different memory culture of the Second World War. Whereas in East Germany, a national commission laid out a single pedagogical mission, in the West public consciousness was ‘shaked’ by for instance periodicals, books, radio, and film. Examples in this respect are Alain Resnais’ movie *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955) and the diary of Anne Frank (1962), but also the Eichmann Trials (1961), and trials of concentration camp commanders. These examples all caused heated debates. After two decades of amnesia in West Germany, the student movement of the 1960s broke through the silence about genocide, in particular in 1968 when concentrations camps like Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, and Neuengamme reopened as memorial sites and genocide thus entered official memory. Then in 1979, the Hollywood television series *Shoah* aroused a national furor. A generation born since 1945, used these opportunities to interrogate their elders about their actions in the Third Reich.

The commemoration culture that developed in the 1980s inspired hundreds of cities and towns to commission memorials to Jews, to restore Jewish cemeteries, and to revive synagogues as museums. ‘To the memory of our fellow Jewish citizens’ replaced vague phrases like ‘no more war’ or ‘to all victims’.⁵⁶

Counter monuments as a method of starting up a public discussion became part of this memory culture, in particular in Germany.

1.3.7 New ‘categories’ of monuments

But not only war monuments shape a new dimension of Dutch monument culture, new ritual practices, and meanings developed. Apart from important national historical events, great painters or poets, or war victims, other themes like disasters or repressed events or groups are eternalized by monuments as has been shown by means of the Amsterdam overview. Dedication ceremonies and commemoration rituals may be seen in a great variety and keep the memory, and the remembering function of the monument alive.

The flux of monuments after the Second World War sets the statement by Robert Musil, ‘There is nothing in the world as invisible as a monument’, in a different perspective.⁵⁷ Michalski, who in 1995 doubts the future of public monuments, states that although new forms have come up, public monuments fear to ‘lose their status as a focus of national and social rites.’⁵⁸ According to Michalski, the future of the public monument is now ‘more open than ever, the distinctions between public monument and public sculpture, between concept and realization, becoming increasingly blurred.’⁵⁹

Since the time Michalski wrote these words, it seems as if public monuments have gained a renewed popularity. Within the ritual repertoire of commemoration, both so called ‘grassroots’ and permanent

⁵⁶ KOONZ: ‘Between memory and oblivion’ 268.

⁵⁷ MUSIL: *Posthumous papers of a living author* 64.

⁵⁸ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 210.

⁵⁹ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 10.

monuments erected for example at the occasion of the anniversary of an event, have become firmly established elements. Musil's remarks may have lost their power, and the monument, as has been demonstrated throughout the Amsterdam impression, has, in the words of Michalski, regained its position in public space.⁶⁰

1.4 The focus on postponed monuments

It is now time to put the focus on postponed monuments and elaborate on this category of monument culture. With regard to the notion of 'postponed' or 'delay', it is obvious that there always will be a period, a lapse of time, between an event and the inauguration of a monument. Just for the simple reason that in most instances time is needed to initiate funds, to have an artist make a design, to agree upon the design and location, and finally to organize construction and inauguration of the monument. Examples of these 'regular' postponed monuments are the Dokwerker (seven years after the Second World War), the Nationaal Monument (11 years after the Second World War), and more recently the initiative to erect a monument honouring the 61 Dutch victims of the Tripoli air disaster which took place in 2010. This initiative was only recently taken by a foundation which was set up to support relatives of the deceased. One of the members of the board, who lost himself two family members, says:

'There is a strong wish to erect a monument. Both at the site of the crash and in the Netherlands. The monument at the site of the crash may be compared with a roadside memorial: it is the place where your loved ones died, but also the very last place where they were still alive [...] in this respect, a monument at that particular place will have in the first place a symbolic meaning.'⁶¹

Besides this regular delay, which may be short or long depending on whether the process is obstructed at any time or not, there may be other reasons for a 'delay' or 'postponement' of the monument which may have a different background, and not a practical one like mentioned above.

A first cause of postponement may be the relevance of the event(s), incident(s) or person(s) which was not such that they 'deserved' a monument in public space at the time. Examples are the Rembrandt and Vondel statues in Amsterdam, which were erected hundreds of years after their death. In a different time frame they were considered important to highlight a glorious past. The Wilhelmina Drucker monument was used to stress the importance of female emancipation and the historical figure of Drucker was immortalized in a monument at a time when women's issues were jeopardized and needed to be emphasized in public space.

A second cause of postponement may be that at the time the social context was different and commemoration in public was not an accepted ritual. Nowadays, in many societies, and also in the

⁶⁰ MUSIL: *Posthumous papers of a living author* 64.

⁶¹ www.fondsslachtofferhulp.nl/ons-werk/projecten/stichting-vliegramp-tripoli/, accessed June 10, 2013.

Netherlands, emotions are much more shown in public, instead of keeping them private. This may have an effect on public commemoration ritual. Following today's accepted ritual repertoire after disasters and tragic incidents, monuments may be erected regarding events from the past which would also have been memorialized in public under the present circumstances, like for instance the monument after the Zanderij or Bijlmer air crash. The sanctifying of the site of the crash, 30 years later, of the Tenerife air disaster at the 13th anniversary of the crash in 2007 may serve as an example of these 'make up' monuments.

A third cause of postponement might be that certain histories which were negative, and maybe shameful or difficult, were not discussed in public, are now open for debate. As a consequence or sometimes as a gesture of reparation, monuments may be erected, for instance the Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden in Amsterdam.

As a consequence, memorialization of sites of tragedy may take decades to complete. The dynamics of this process have been explored extensively by the American cultural geographer Kenneth Foote.⁶²

1.5 Central research question

This research project is focused on postponed monuments as a separate category within Dutch monument culture after the Second World War. Context, function, and meaning of postponed monuments in public space will be explored. Why is a postponed monument nowadays such an important element of memory culture? What messages do monuments convey that people put so many effort in the erection of a monument, even a long time after the event or the disaster took place? And, once the monument has been erected, what does it mean to them and how do they appreciate the triad of monument, space, and commemoration?

A preliminary answer might be found in the current upsurge in the recovery of repressed memories of communities or individuals whose histories have been ignored or hidden. An additional aspect that needs mentioning is an increasing emphasis in today's society upon trauma, grief emotion, reconciliation, and apology.⁶³ And last, an increasing interest in genealogical research, and family narratives might also relate to the relevance of erecting monuments in public space to disclose the importance of certain events which occurred in the past.

The issue of raising a monument is in particular interesting to investigate when there has been a long time between the event itself and the moment of erection of the monument. As a consequence of recurrent memory, there appears to be a need for settlement of emotions and recognition of what happened at the time, and what is recalled by the monument. The monument may be used as a 'medium' to reach a particular goal.

Postponed monuments, as mentioned and described above, have so far not been investigated as a separate category. In this project, the significance of erecting a (postponed) monument in public space

⁶² FOOTE: *Shadowed ground*; FOOTE: 'Shadowed ground, sacred place' 93-119.

⁶³ GARDE-HANSEN: *Media and memory* 13-14.

and consequently the ‘production’ of a special place intended for public memory for initiators and other people involved, will be explored in depth.

To summarize: this research project is focused on postponed monuments in different settings and their context and meaning.

The central question may be formulated as follows:

What is the manifestation, context, and meaning of postponed monuments in the contemporary Dutch memorial culture?

Four subsections will be explored:

- erection and objectives, form, symbolism, and location of the monument;
- ritual practices of the monument;
- individual and social context;
- meaning and function of the monument to people closely associated with the monument.

1.6 Case studies

In order to reach a broad, nationwide perspective, the focus in this explorative research project will be on four different Dutch postponed monuments, summarized in four case studies. Below a short description of the selected monuments is given and in addition a justification of their selection as case study will be presented.

The Second World War and its consequences were the incentive for a tremendous amount of monuments in public space, about 3300 in total.⁶⁴ Until today, each year monuments are erected dedicated to the Second World War.

The theme and appearance of war monuments changed during the years. Immediately after the war, the focus of remembering was on the heroes of the resistance in the war, and as a consequence monuments were erected in this respect. It took decades to remember for example victims of the Shoah, and before there was enough backing to honour these victims with monuments.

Since war monuments have been erected at such a big scale two monuments have been selected from this category.

Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück at the Museumplein in Amsterdam (1975)

Ravensbrück was a women’s concentration camp during the Second World War, located in northern Germany, 90 kilometers north of Berlin in the neighbourhood of the village of Ravensbrück.⁶⁵ Although it was in principal built as a camp for female political prisoners, there were also men imprisoned. In total 123,000 women and 20,000 men were detained from 1939 till liberation of the camp by the Russian army on April 30, 1945. About 850 women and 300 men originated from the Netherlands.

⁶⁴ NATIONAAL COMITÉ 4 EN 5 MEI, WEITKAMP (red.): *Beleidshandreiking beheer en behoud oorlogsmonumenten*.

⁶⁵ STREBEL: *Das KZ Ravensbrück*; HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering*.

In 1975, the Ravensbrück monument was erected at the Museumplein in Amsterdam. Every year in April, around the time of liberation of the camp, a memorial ceremony is held at the site of the monument.

This monument has been selected for several reasons. Firstly because the monument was erected 30 years after the Second World War ended. What is the background of this ‘postponement’? Secondly, this monument offers a suitable case study because the ‘installation type’ design, an abstract design combined with sound and light elements was at the time a very remarkable choice with regard to a war monument. The interaction with the audience is, up and till today, an interesting aspect to explore.

A new medium/type of Second World War monument: Het Digitaal Monument voor de Joodse gemeenschap in Nederland en de Community Joods Monument (2005 and 2010)

In the first decade after the Second World War, few monuments honouring Dutch victims of the Shoah were erected in public space. The first Dutch monuments to honour and remember the victims of the Shoah appeared in public space around the 1960s.⁶⁶ Within the scope of this project, Shoah monuments may be called postponed monuments and this is, among others, a reason for selection of a Shoah monument as a case study.

In the field of memory studies, theoretical frameworks are issues of debate.⁶⁷ New theoretical frameworks are being developed which share a focus on the use of ‘media’: ‘mediated memories’ are remembrances of things past which mediate not only individual remembrances but also relationships between individuals and groups.⁶⁸ In this respect, Astrid Erll proposes a so called ‘media approach’. She developed a heuristic model of cultural memory and rooted her model in anthropological and semiotic approaches to culture.⁶⁹ In this respect, she mentions the example of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC (1982), also called The Wall. In 1996, to this memorial a virtual wall was added, dedicated to honouring those who died in the Vietnam War.⁷⁰ This change of medium and the possibilities offered by the internet may change the practice of memory, according to Erll. Every user may create an own homepage, which may result in a ‘strongly personalized mode of remembering’.⁷¹

In April 2005, the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands went online. This monument is an Internet monument dedicated to preserving the memory of all the men, women, and children who were persecuted as Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and did not survive the Shoah.⁷² Professor Isaac Lipschits (1930-2008) took the initiative to create a memorial that would offer insights into the lives of Dutch Jews who died in the Shoah, the total number of which

⁶⁶ Van GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 121.

⁶⁷ DIJCK: *Mediated memories in the digital age* 1-26; ERL: *Memory in culture*.

⁶⁸ DIJCK: *Mediated memories in the digital age*; ERL: *Memory in culture*.

⁶⁹ ERL: *Memory in culture* 95-143.

⁷⁰ www.thewall-usa.com, accessed April 16, 2013.

⁷¹ ERL: *Memory in culture*.

⁷² www.joodsmonument.nl, accessed March 20, 2013.

exceeded 100,000. The home page is the actual ‘monument’, consisting of a screen with thousands of tiny coloured bars. Every person in the monument has a separate page commemorating his or her life. The monument has two main objectives. The first is to preserve the memory of Jews in the Netherlands who perished during the Shoah; the second is to enable survivors and other interested visitors to find out more about the victims of the Shoah. In 2010 the Jewish Monument Community, an interactive website complementary to the Digital Monument, went online. On the Community website, pictures, information, and stories about persons and families that are commemorated with the monument may be exchanged.⁷³

With this monument and accompanying community, a new approach to commemoration is introduced while new concepts in design, memorial space, and communication are applied. Apart from the aspect of postponement, these new concepts lead to inclusion of the digital monument and its monument-community in the project as a case study.

Apart from postponed war monuments, two different postponed monuments have been selected as case studies. The third case study concerns a type of monument that belongs to the category of ‘emancipation of groups’ monuments as described in the Amsterdam overview presented above.

Monuments to stillborn children (from 2000)

Until the 1990s, it was a well-accepted practice in the Netherlands to separate a child who had died before or just after birth, from his or her parents. In this way professional caregivers considered themselves to ‘help’ the parents to get over their grief. The idea was that it would be better not to get attached to the child, not to make memories, and to ‘ignore’ the ever existence of the baby. The usual memorial rituals were completely neglected and parents often did not get the chance to organise a funeral ceremony. Others, hospital staff, or people belonging to the church, took over and most often these stillborn children were buried in an anonymous way and without a known burial place. In this way, what should have been a most happy time, the birth of a child turned into a nightmare for the parents.

In 2000, commemorative monuments to remember these ‘lost’ children started to be erected in many Dutch graveyards. As of 2012, there are around 160 in total.⁷⁴ As a result of an overwhelming attention from the media, a public discussion started and many parents started searching for their lost child. Once they have found this place, their grieving process restarts. They also feel the need to ‘mark’ the lost place with memorial rituals.

The meaning of this memorial space for the parents is one of grief and comfort for the lost child. It is also a message of public contestation against dominant parties who did not allow proper memorial rituals at the time of birth and death of the child.⁷⁵

⁷³ www.communityjoodsmonument.nl, accessed March 20, 2013.

⁷⁴ PEELEN: *Between birth and death*.

⁷⁵ FARO: ‘Van een glimlach die voorbij kwam en het stille verdriet’.

This type of monument is relevant because of their number, and ‘popularity’. They form one of the new categories within Dutch monument culture, and investigation of some monuments in particular may offer valuable answers to the leading questions of this project.

The last case study relates to a postponed disaster monument. Disaster monuments have become more prominent since 1990 and postponed disaster monuments have appeared as well because of the initiative of victims or of relatives of the victims. The monument near the site of the crash of the Tenerife air disaster may serve as an example of a 30 year postponed monument, but for practical reasons a monument within the Dutch borders was chosen as a case study.

Monument to the Harmelen railway disaster (2012)

On January 8, 2012, a monument was unveiled near Harmelen to honour the victims of a railway accident. The initiators decided not to name this monument. The initiative to the monument was taken by people of the local community in memory of the victims of the biggest Dutch railway disaster ever. This railway accident took place exactly 50 years before in the immediate vicinity of the monument.

If we observe the monument, we will discern a bronze human figure with neither legs nor arms: ‘The broken man’ as he is called by the artist. The figure is placed on a console and symbolizes the victims of this railway collision which took the life of 93 people and left many injured.

The initiative and organization of the monument and of the unveiling ceremony was taken in particular by the mayor and the chairman of the Harmelen community platform. Main reason was to commemorate the 50th ‘anniversary’ of the train crash, and to honour not only the victims, but also local people, medical personnel, and all others who were active in the rescue and salvation procedures.

Main reason to select this monument for case study research was the long period between time of disaster and erection of the monument, and the express wish of victims to identify the site of the crash with a monument.

1.7 Research method: qualitative, explorative study within the field of ritual studies

1.7.1 The objective of this study and the appropriate research method

The objective of this study is to explore the position and meaning of postponed monuments. More in particular, the focus of this project is on the meaning of these monuments regarding people who are personally attached to these monuments.

In order to answer the formulated research question, an appropriate research method has to be selected. Corbin and Strauss assert that the research question should ‘dictate’ the methodological research approach.⁷⁶ In order to answer the central research question of this project, focused on the meaning of

⁷⁶ CORBIN & STRAUSS: *Basics of qualitative research* 12.

ritual commemorative practices at a monument, it is essential to enter the ‘field’ in which these practices take place and observe and consider people in their relation to a postponed monument. As the main objective of qualitative research is to ‘[...] study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’, it seems appropriate to apply a qualitative research method in this mainly explorative research project.⁷⁷ Denzin and Lincoln state that within qualitative research, a variety of empirical materials may be gathered through alternative sources. Case study materials, personal experiences, life stories, interviews, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts are mentioned in this respect.⁷⁸

1.7.2 Qualitative research and ethnographic research method in ritual studies

Within ritual studies qualitative research methods and in particular ethnographic field work is an appropriate and accepted method of research.⁷⁹ Ritual specialist Ronald Grimes discusses how ‘ritual in the field’, ritual practices, should be investigated: ‘A field is a physical and social place where one goes to do a study, as well as a pattern of interconnecting forces. The ritual field is both the locus of ritual practice and the totality of a ritual’s structures and processes.’⁸⁰ Grimes stresses the idea of field study within ritual studies because there is a need to encounter ritual directly and also because anthropologists have written about rituals on basis of participant observation and as ritual scholars we need to engage ourselves in field study ‘in order to understand the history of such writing about ritual’. In this project the first argument is most important: in order to grasp the meaning and context of postponed monuments, it is essential to explore commemoration practices as they are enacted by people closely involved with postponed monuments. The second argument is less relevant because up and until today, postponed monuments, as a separate category within the whole range of monument culture, have not been theme of previous rituals studies research within the Netherlands.

1.7.3 Research method in this project

This project is an exploratory study primarily in the field of ritual studies. Qualitative methods of data collection as described above will be used and through analysis of the empirical data, the behaviour, goals, habits, and context of people direct involved with a postponed monument will be explored. I will focus on how they communicate, what information they impart and use, what decisions they make, which emotions are involved, and which meaning is allocated to their participation in a commemoration ceremony or other commemoration activities at a postponed monument. Essentially, I am treating the people around a postponed monument as a group of people with their own set of practices,

⁷⁷ DENZIN & LINCOLN: ‘Introduction’ 4.

⁷⁸ DENZIN & LINCOLN: ‘Introduction’ 4.

⁷⁹ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 37-55.

⁸⁰ GRIMES: *Beginnings in ritual studies* 3.

and through qualitative research I am hoping to reveal deeper links between the monument, ritual practices, and place.

Grimes holds the opinion that ‘the meaning of “ritual” depends on the context.’⁸¹ It may be so that people who participate in a commemoration ritual feel that this is a meaningful process to them personally, but besides this personal aspect, rituals ‘bear, carry, or conjure meaning’, according to Grimes.⁸² The fieldwork had the objective to reveal the meaning of ritual practices at postponed monuments with a focus on people directly involved with the monument.

The fieldwork was performed in the separate case studies. In the first place by means of in depth and semi-structured interviews with people with a personal attachment to the postponed monument, selected for case study research as described above. Other empirical materials like personal experiences have been collected through observations of ritual commemoration practices. Last, if relevant, other materials like for instance life stories, written sources like the texts mentioned by Denzin and Lincoln, have been gathered and used as an input for interpretation and analysis. All these materials have been collected in order to describe contexts, ritual practices and routines with the objective to assign meaning to these postponed monuments, as described by Grimes.

1.8 Outline of this thesis

In Chapter 1, an introduction is given on the subject and background of this project concerning manifestation, context, and meaning of postponed monuments. As an illustration of the context of postponed monuments within monument culture, a brief panorama on selected monuments in Amsterdam is presented. Deduced from this overview and short discussion, background and relevance of the leading research question are formulated. This explanation is followed by a description of the case studies and justification of their selection with regard to the empirical part of this study. Finally, a description of the applied research method is given.

In Chapter 2, a theoretical exploration of the key concepts of this project is presented.

The results of the empirical part of this project, enacted through four case studies, will be presented in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

The last chapter, Chapter 7, offers a summary and final remarks with conclusions towards the central research question on manifestation, context, and meaning of postponed monuments.

⁸¹ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 185.

⁸² GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 318.

Chapter 2

Theoretical exploration of the key concepts

*In remembering, we come back to the things that matter*⁸³

2.1 Introduction: memorial culture, space and place

In this study, the central question is focused on the position, and meaning of postponed, or ‘late’, monuments in the public area.

Within the field of ritual studies, culture may be defined as ‘the whole of human activities, particularly as these are coordinated in recognizable patterns and forms.’⁸⁴ In line with this definition, ‘monument culture’ will be defined in this project as: all human activities in relation to monuments like initiatives, and erection, form and appearances, place, and commemoration rituals and practices.

In line with the focus of this project on postponed monuments, it is of particular interest to investigate why people, sometimes a (very) long time after the event, wish to erect a monument intended for commemoration rituals and practices at a public place. Issues at stake in this respect are (recurrent) memory and (public) space and place as important stages for (commemoration) rituals and practices in our present culture. The research questions of this project are accordingly positioned in interacting research fields: ritual studies, and cultural and memory studies.

The theme of culture and memory involves disciplines like philosophy, anthropology, history, religious and ritual studies, psychology, communication and media studies. Accordingly, cultural memory studies nowadays has emerged as a multidisciplinary field.⁸⁵ Related to the observed ‘current obsession with memory’ or ‘hypertrophy’ of memory,⁸⁶ memory culture scholars emphasize a related ‘explosion of memory-related research’.⁸⁷ The current interest in memory related issues may be explained by the current definition of memory: not as something exclusively from the past, but always ‘linked’ to the present: a memory is always made ‘present’. In *Multidirectional memory*, Michael Rothberg explores the ‘minimalist’ definition of memory as proposed by Richard Terdiman in *Present past: Modernity and the memory crisis*: ‘memory is the past made present.’⁸⁸ Rothberg comments that the notion of a ‘making present’ has two implications. A first one is that memory is not something of the past but a contemporary phenomenon: while concerned with the past memory happens in the

⁸³ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* xxii.

⁸⁴ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture* 17.

⁸⁵ ERLI: *Memory in culture* 2.

⁸⁶ HUYSEN: *Twilight memories* 6; HUYSEN: *Presents pasts* 3.

⁸⁷ GARDE-HANSEN: *Media and memory* 13.

⁸⁸ ROTHBERG: *Multidirectional memory* 3-4.

present. In this project there is a connection between persons or events of the past and remembering them in the present by means of a monument. A second observation is that memory is 'a form of work', people who remember act through interventions and practices at particular places, for instance by means of erecting a monument.

The American philosopher Edward Casey states that through the 'work' of commemoration the past does not just disappear in the present, but instead only traverses the present on its way to becoming future: '[...]. It is the creating of memorializations in the media of ritual, text, and psyche; it enables us to honour the past by carrying it intact into new and lasting forms of alliance and participation.'⁸⁹

In this respect the past, present and the future are connected through memory and commemoration and with the aid of media like ritual and text, or perhaps by means of the erection of a monument.

Although there are liaisons with the field of cultural memory studies, and public art, this project is primarily embedded in the field of ritual studies. Within this field, ritual practices, closely connected to a monument, belong to 'an emerging ritual repertoire'.⁹⁰ Liturgical and ritual specialist Paul Post defines in our culture a number of so called 'fields' in which ritual repertoires and 'sacred places' may be observed. A ritual is a 'more or less repeatable sequence of action units which take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization and their situation in place and time.'⁹¹ A 'field' is a domain with no firmly established boundaries but more a zone which is evoked by concrete places, practices, and representations and thus also involves a certain identity. One of the most prominent fields is the field of memory culture. This field involves monuments and their memorial space and form, and the practices and experiences concerning commemoration rituals.

Regarding the presence of religion and ritual in the public domain, Post remarks that the expression 'place' offers a perspective on a basic ritual dimension. Place matters: very often it is place which directs rituality. Ritual places may be called the funding basis of our society because they relate to our ritual-symbolic competence, and act as an interaction of symbol, ritual, and myth. The apparent manifestation of 'place' in our society and culture is reflected in cultural studies, in the study of religion and theology, and in particular in the broad domain of ritual studies. The ritual or sacred place has become a very important theme. The dimension of 'place' can be seen as a podium of representation and imagination and related ritual practices.⁹² Following religion, and ritual scholar Kim Knott⁹³ in her study on the location of religion and space, Post elaborates on the relation between 'ritual fields', and the dimension of ritual place, and uses in this respect the concept of 'spatial triad' as developed by the French Marxist intellectual Henri Lefebvre.⁹⁴ In Post's interpretation of this 'spatial triad' the interference of place, ritual and representation becomes essential. Place and space are always 'productive' categories with three aspects which interfere with each other in a dialectic relationship.

⁸⁹ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 257.

⁹⁰ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESSEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture* 8, 36-37, 45-46.

⁹¹ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESSEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture* 18.

⁹² POST: *Voorbij het kerkgebouw* 76-83.

⁹³ KNOTT: *The location of religion: a spatial analysis*.

⁹⁴ LEFEBVRE: *The production of space*.

So called ‘representations of space’ refer to ‘conceived or conceptualized’ space, with regard to this research project the representation of, for example, persons or events in monuments, designed, and created by sculptors may serve as a relevant example. ‘Representations of space’ relates to the first characteristic of the triad.

The second characteristic of the triad refers to so called ‘spaces of representation’. This second element of the triad relates to the ‘lived space’ in which associations with symbols and images are active. With regard to monuments, this characteristic would refer to the symbolization as created by the artist and how this is understood by the viewer.

A third characteristic refers to so called ‘spatial practices’ and the way people act and create or produce ‘space’, either literally or figuratively. For example during a commemoration ritual at a monument, a memorial space, both literally and symbolically, is created.

In addition to this framework, I would like to propose and introduce within the field of ritual studies, the concepts on memory and place by Casey. In line with the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Casey takes a phenomenological approach and emphasizes the relevance of anthropological fieldwork: ‘The insistently descriptive character of the phenomenological enterprise in philosophy rejoins the emphasis in anthropology on precise description in the field [...]’.⁹⁵ This emphasis on fieldwork corresponds to the research method of this project as defined in Chapter 1.

The concepts of memory and place are of interest in exploring the category of postponed monuments, after all ‘postponed’ in this project refers to memories of persons and events for which people want to ‘produce’ a memorial place by means of a monument in the public area. It means that individual memories are transformed into public memories, through sharing them with others in a public place.⁹⁶

Casey joins memory and place: ‘[...] the relationship between memory and place is at once intimate and profound.’⁹⁷ Often a memory is either of a place itself or of an event or a person ‘in a place’.⁹⁸ Casey defines place in line with Aristotle in his *Physics* as ‘the innermost motionless boundary of what contains.’ According to Aristotle, place must be considered as a ‘container of the thing’.⁹⁹ Place holds its contents within its boundaries:

‘It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability. An alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, finding in its features that favor and parallel its own activities. We might even say that memory is naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported. Moreover, it is itself a place wherein the past can revive and survive [...]’.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ CASEY: ‘How to get from space to place in a fairly short stretch of time’.

⁹⁶ CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’ 17-44.

⁹⁷ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 183.

⁹⁸ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 183.

⁹⁹ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 184.

¹⁰⁰ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 187.

2.1.1 Key concepts of this project

Following Casey's conceptual framework on place, memory, time and commemoration, I will explore how postponed monuments are utilized to initiate a public place for commemoration of events or persons from the past. Integrating the observations on the exploration of Amsterdam monuments with Casey's framework, the following key concepts were phrased for this project: monuments, ritual commemoration practices, and place.

Preceding fieldwork on postponed monuments, a theoretical exploration of the emerging key concepts will be presented.

Hereunder the key concepts will be discussed more in detail with regard to their theoretical background. In depth investigation and discussion of the key concepts sets out the theoretical framework regarding the case studies' research.

The sequence of the key concepts is as follows. I will start with an exploration of the concept 'monument'; what exactly is a monument, and how is it defined. A next issue regards the function and ritual practices of a monument and these aspects will be discussed within the key concept of 'commemoration'. The commemoration function of the monument is one of the research themes of this project. The place of the monument and the manner in which the location is used at the time of commemoration rituals will be discussed as key concept 'place'. And finally, the concepts of Edward Casey will be presented and discussed to explore the concept of postponed monuments.

But first I will have to explore the concept of monument itself because of its major position in this project and work out the relationship between monument, memory, place, and commemoration.

2.2 First key concept: monument

2.2.1 Introduction

A very extensive and all-embracing understanding of a monument is given by German art historian Jochen Spielmann (1995).¹⁰¹ To start the exploration of the concept monument, this definition is helpful in outlining the context:

'A monument is an independent work of art reminding us of people or events. It is erected in a public space by a specific group on a specific site and is designed to endure. In this process, a monument fulfils a function of identification, legitimization, representation, anticipation, interpretation and information. Its acts as a symbol in so far as it sustains political and historical discussion in a society, provides a link between cultural formation and institutionalized com-

¹⁰¹ He is cited in full in CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 35 and this citation appeared originally in: SPIELMANN: 'Der Prozess ist genauso wichtig wie das Ergebnis', in Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (ed.): *Der Wettbewerb für das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Berlin 1995) 128-45, 129f.

munication, and is both a manifestation of cultural memory and historical consciousness. [...] A monument is the result of a communication process involving conflictory negotiation of the interpretation of history. Discussion, development and reception are an integral part of the monument itself. In order to be and remain a monument, it must be subjected to ritual reception.'

Important aspects in Spielmann's interpretation are: monuments are independent works of art, the essence of a monument is to remind us of people or events, and a monument is erected in a public space at a specific site and designed to endure.

Regarding the 'function' of a monument Spielmann mentions: identification, representation, anticipation, and information. The reception of the monument by the public, what meaning does the 'audience' give to the monument, is an important element. A last aspect that Spielmann mentions concerns the 'ritual reception' of the monument which he states, is essential to keep the monument from oblivion. A monument remains 'visible' in the eyes of the public through commemoration, either during regular ceremonies or through other activities like documentaries, films, educational projects or just an explanatory plaque at the monument.

2.2.2 Alois Riegl's exploration of the concept 'monument'

An early exploration of the concept monument is *The modern cult of monuments: its essence and its development*, by the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905). In 1903 he presented a very open concept of monuments.¹⁰² His definition of monuments is as follows:

'In its oldest and most original sense a monument is a work of man erected for the specific purpose of keeping particular human deeds or destinies (or a complex accumulation thereof) alive and present in the consciousness of future generations.'

In its form monuments may be works 'either of art or of writing', depending on whether the event to be eternalized is conveyed to the viewer exclusively through the expressive means of 'fine arts' or with the aid of description, that is of writing. According to Riegl, the erection and maintenance of such 'deliberate' monuments, which can be traced back to the earliest documented periods of human culture, have all but come to a halt today. When, in 1903, Riegl speaks of the 'modern cult of monuments' he not only refers to 'deliberate' monuments, but also to the cult of historic preservation of buildings, objects and other elements in a culture which consequently embody a remembering function and are thus transformed into monuments.

Initiators of a monument have the intention and objective to keep the memory of a person or an event alive with the aid of a work of art. Monuments differ from other sculptures in public space because they are erected with this particular function. A monument may be a plaque, a statue or a figurative or

¹⁰² RIEGL: *Der moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung*.

abstract work of art, all intended to remember. The intention of keeping a memory alive is not always a continuing success: monuments may lose, at a particular moment in time, their ‘remembering’ function when the public has forgotten the dedication of the monument or when it is not clearly indicated what the monument represents, like for instance the statue of Marcus Aurelius as described in Chapter 1.

As a consequence, the monument ‘transforms’ back from ‘monument’ to ‘a work of public art’. Depending on the ‘quality’ of the work of art the monument may turn ‘invisible’, as stated by Musil: ‘There is nothing in the world as invisible as a monument.’¹⁰³ It may be appreciated because of its form or material but it has lost its ‘remembering’ function. And it may be so that a passer-by raises an interest in the work of art, stops to read the explanatory sign, if present, hence transferring the piece of art back into its function as monument.¹⁰⁴

2.2.3 The term ‘monument’ and cultural heritage

Historic preservation of buildings, objects and other elements in a culture as already mentioned by Riegl as belonging to the ‘modern cult of monuments’ are in the Netherlands nowadays covered by the Dutch *Monumentenwet* of 1988 (rules of law regarding monuments) with the objective to protect objects of cultural heritage. This law has the objective to govern the salvation and maintenance of monumental architecture and monumental archaeological objects and sites.¹⁰⁵ This law gives a broad definition and description of which monuments fall within the scope and the rules of the law. These monuments all belong to the cultural heritage of the Netherlands and will be protected and safeguarded by government if they come under the restrictions of the law. A monument may be a building with a culture historical significance but also a historical town or a village view that needs to be protected. Most of the time, monuments will relate to immovables but it is also possible that movables, like historical trains or busses, come under the scope of the law.

The Dutch historian Willem Frijhoff describes two dimensions of monuments: their heritage dimension and their remembering dimension.¹⁰⁶

In my project I will focus on this last dimension of monuments, objects of public art, and they may not be monuments in the meaning of the *Monumentenwet* as described above.

¹⁰³ Musil: Posthumous papers of a living author 64.

¹⁰⁴ OOSTERBAAN: ‘Tekens met betekenis. De onbarmhartige paradox van het gedenkteken’ 156-160.

¹⁰⁵ *Wet van 23 December 1988, tot vervanging van de Monumentenwet*, www.wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0004471/geldigheidsdatum_08-04-2013.

¹⁰⁶ FRIJHOFF: *Dynamisch erfgoed*.

2.2.4 Monument or memorial?

It is important to clarify the terminology used, in particular the terms ‘monument’ and ‘memorial’, in particular because the distinction was made in Chapter 1 between grassroots memorials and postponed monuments.¹⁰⁷

Public art specialist and art historian Cher Krause Knight states that ‘a monument seeks to celebrate’ and ‘a memorial aims to commemorate’.¹⁰⁸ Apparently the distinction between the two lies in the difference between ‘remembering glorious events or persons’ and ‘commemorating tragic events and losses’, for instance by means of grassroots memorials. According to Knight, a monument ‘offers a physical manifestation to mark a military victory or depict a cultural hero’ while a memorial is meant to express ‘loss from war or disease, or remembering a tragic or profound event.’¹⁰⁹ A memorial provides the possibility to ‘reflect and grieve, and may or may not result in built form.’¹¹⁰ As a consequence, her second distinction lies in the appearance: a monument is always a ‘built form’ and a memorial may have other appearances. In this respect she follows the line of argumentation of James Young. In his landmark study on Shoah memorials *The texture of memory* (1993), James Young prefers to make only in a broader, more generic sense a distinction between a monument and a memorial.¹¹¹ Marita Sturken in her discussion of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1997) states that the terms monument and memorial can often be used as interchangeable forms but she observes a distinction in intent between the two terms.¹¹² Both authors mention in this respect the work of the American art critic and philosopher, Arthur Danto (1924):

‘We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget. Thus we have the Washington Monument but the Lincoln Memorial. Monuments commemorate the memorable and embody myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the reality of ends... The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead. With monuments we honor ourselves.’¹¹³

Sturken follows Danto, and holds the opinion that ‘monuments are not generally built to commemorate defeats; the defeated dead are remembered in memorials.’¹¹⁴ In her opinion a monument signifies ‘victory’, and a memorial refers to the lives ‘sacrificed for a particular set of values’. As said before, Young prefers to make a distinction in a more ‘generic’ sense: ‘there are memorial books,

¹⁰⁷ However, the distinction between the term ‘monument’ and ‘memorial’ is not a relevant point in Dutch language; the term monument refers to all public art either with a remembering or commemorating (or both) function.

¹⁰⁸ KRAUSE KNIGHT: *Public art. Theory, practice and populism* 23.

¹⁰⁹ KRAUSE KNIGHT: *Public art. Theory, practice and populism* 23.

¹¹⁰ KRAUSE KNIGHT: *Public art. Theory, practice and populism* 23.

¹¹¹ YOUNG: *The texture of memory* 3-4.

¹¹² STURKEN: *Tangled memories* 47-48.

¹¹³ DANTO: ‘The Vietnam Veterans Monument’ 153.

¹¹⁴ STURKEN: *Tangled memories* 47.

memorial activities, memorial festivals, and memorial sculptures.¹¹⁵ Some of these memorials may be mournful while others are celebratory, but they are all memorials. Young defines a monument as a ‘subset of memorials: the material objects, sculptures, and installations, used to memorialize a person or a thing.’¹¹⁶ All memory sites are considered as ‘memorials’, while the ‘plastic objects’ within these sites are monuments. To be more specific: a memorial may be a day, a conference or a space, but it does not have to be a monument. On the other hand, a monument is always a kind of memorial, according to Young.

Knight offers a very restricted use of the term monument: in her view a monument is only applicable to public art honouring persons or events. In the Netherlands also public art commemorating war, disasters or other tragedies are called ‘monuments’. Young’s definition of a monument is much broader including also tragic events.

In this project which is focused on Dutch public monuments, I will follow in principal the line of argumentation of Young: I will speak of the ‘monument’ when I refer to, for instance, the topical installation Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück at the Museumplein in Amsterdam.

2.2.5 Public monuments

Some authors, for instance Sergiusz Michalski whose work on the historical development of the public monument has been discussed in Chapter 1, refer in their definition of the concept monument to the relationship between the notion ‘public’ and ‘monument’.

The American art historian Marianne Doezema follows this line of interpretation in her essay *The public monument in tradition and transition* (1973). She added the word ‘public’ suggesting a ‘wide audience’. The word ‘monument’ refers, according to Doezema, to a ‘didactic or commemorative function.’¹¹⁷ Public is meant in the sense of open to general observation and pertaining to the people of a country or locality. However, according to Doezema, many things we call public monuments simply exist as works of art in public spaces. Her interpretation is very general: a public monument is meant to remind people of a person, an event or an idea. Next, Doezema discusses how we should understand or ‘grasp’ the meaning of a monument. In order to understand a public monument fully, the monument must be considered in terms of its relationship to its audience. The ‘success’ of a public monument is measured by its ability to communicate or elicit a response. Iconography and style alone cannot account for its effectiveness, according to Doezema. The public monument ‘has a responsibility’ apart from its qualities as a work of art. This responsibility lies in its capability of communicating a message which the public may understand. A public monument is certainly a private expression of an individual artist but it should also be evaluated in terms of its capacity to generate reactions from the

¹¹⁵ YOUNG: *The texture of memory* 4.

¹¹⁶ YOUNG: *The texture of memory* 4.

¹¹⁷ DOEZEMA: ‘The public monument in tradition and transition’ 9.

public. At the same time, this audience has the ‘obligation’ to make an effort to understand the artist’s modes of expression.

And also James Young emphasizes the dialogic capabilities of monuments and memorials: ‘Memorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac.’¹¹⁸ Young puts the focus on the visitor’s essential role in the memorial space. The meaning of the monument is not depending upon the forms and figures in the monument itself but on the viewer’s response to the monument and how it may be used politically and religiously in the community.

A fourth example of an author who discusses the relationship between the audience and the monument is Peter Carrier in his work on holocaust monuments. Carrier states that it is not easy to define the term ‘monument’: ‘At present there appear to be no collectively accepted conventions governing the forms, motifs, themes or messages of public monuments.’¹¹⁹ He defines a monument as: ‘a social process, and as a meeting of symbols and words.’¹²⁰ According to Carrier, this definition is more ‘equivocal than art-historical concepts of form and style.’¹²¹ In this way the multidimensional, political and artistic aspects of public art may be appreciated. Because of these problems in defining ‘monuments’, what do they embody and represent, Carrier considers focusing on the ‘effects’ and in this respect he refers to the concepts of Young and considers a monument as an object of dialogue between individuals and groups: ‘the meaning of monuments is not located in monuments themselves.’¹²² Forms of contemporary monuments are multiple and open. Carrier calls the dialogue provoked by monuments their defining feature thereby facilitating open exchange of plural interpretations of history and of the function of historical memories in relation to their representations, and forms of transmission.¹²³ He holds a similar opinion as Doezeema and Young on the dialogic character of monuments.

2.2.6 The (intended) and practical function or meaning of a monument

In accordance with the opinion of Doezeema, Carrier states that a monument may never lay claim to ‘artistic autonomy from its social and historical context.’ A monument is necessarily a product and reflection of its time. Its erection is derived from the initiative of an individual, group or state. The erection, and consequently the reception of monuments by the general public are determined by three moments in time:

- first: the moment of the historical event or individual or group represented by the monument;
- second: the moment at which the monument was conceived and constructed;
- third: the moment of reception of the monument.

¹¹⁸ YOUNG: *The texture of memory* preface xii.

¹¹⁹ CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 22.

¹²⁰ CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 22.

¹²¹ CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 22.

¹²² CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 213.

¹²³ CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 217.

Carrier uses the symbol of a prism as a heuristic instrument to clarify historical and political contexts: 'Just as a prism filters and deflects light, monuments act as a medium between the (historical) event and the spectator's eye.' Monuments must be read as coded historical interpretations based on their form and context. Figurative monuments might make an appeal to identify with the represented figure, while counter monuments of the sort produced by artists like Edward Kienholz or Jochen Gerz invite the spectator to call into question the very process of monumental representation.¹²⁴ According to Carrier meaning is not fixed in stone, but will vary according to subjective criteria.

The practical function or meaning of a monument will depend on the interpretation of the viewer, and these interpretations will depend upon prior knowledge of both history, and the history of the monument. Meaning will also depend upon the degree of personal and emotional involvement resulting from participation in events as witnesses or not. Direct witnesses may respond differently from those who learn about the events retrospectively either via monuments, books, photographs, films, or eye-witness accounts.¹²⁵

Jay Winter in his work on the memory of the First World War, the 'Great War', considers war memorials to be 'foci of the rituals, rhetoric, and ceremonies of bereavement.'¹²⁶ He focuses on another 'meaning' apart from the aesthetic or political message they might carry or attract. War monuments have a particular meaning for those who have passed through the trauma of the war. That meaning could be as much 'existential as artistic or political, as much concerned with the facts of individual loss and bereavement as with art forms or with collective representations, national aspirations, and with destinies.'¹²⁷ They are places where people grieve either individually or collectively.

2.2.7 Dialogue between monument and audience

This element of dialogue, as suggested by Doezeema, Young and Carrier, is not something new that came up in the late 20th century. Sergiusz Michalski in his work on the public political monument states that governments are often involved for political reasons in the erection of public monuments: 'The monumental art of the Third Republic in Paris directly reflects the state's ideological foundations.'¹²⁸ The monument is used as a medium to convey messages to the audience.

Already in the inter war period, representatives of the art movement the Surrealists saw in the public monument elements of a dialogue between the *flâneur* and his city. A public monument is constituted, according to the French writer and poet André Breton' as a *figure de participation*: people should be able to 'participate' in the monument. This *figure* should be questioned and provoked in what Michalski calls a 'free play of rhetorical and poetic associations.'¹²⁹ Monuments possess their own

¹²⁴ See also YOUNG: *The texture of memory* 17-48.

¹²⁵ CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 32-33.

¹²⁶ WINTER: *Sites of memory, sites of mourning* 78.

¹²⁷ WINTER: *Sites of memory, sites of mourning* 79.

¹²⁸ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 27.

¹²⁹ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 47.

‘potential power’ as is shown in for example Louis Aragon’s novel *Le paysan de Paris* (1926). Aragon suggests that statues may intervene in the lives of passersby, he refuses them a Pygmalion – like life on their own. In 1918, a French journalist, Pierre Reverdy in his magazine *Nord-Sud* emphasized the aspect of emotion which should be provoked by a monument: ‘*Ce qui est grand ce n’est pas l’image – mais l’emotion qu’elle provoque; si cette dernière est grande on estimera l’image à sa mesure.*’¹³⁰

In this respect, Edward Casey poses the question what exactly an ‘effective’ monument will look like. He considers Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial to be an effective monument because it offers a ‘public space in which the spontaneous expression of feeling and the exchange of thought are enabled and enhanced.’¹³¹ This monument may be contrasted with ‘unfriendly’ and thus ‘ineffective’ monuments like for instance the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, standing in the middle of heavy traffic at an uninviting place and where it will be difficult to achieve an intimacy between the monument and the commemorator.

The American Kirk Savage, expert in art and architecture, also questions the concept of public monuments in his seminal work *Monument wars. Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the transformation of the memorial landscape*.¹³² In the introduction of this book, he expresses fear about the ‘inherently conservative art form’ of public monuments. As a consequence:

‘They obey the logic of the last word, the logic of closure. Inscriptions are fixed forever; statues do not move and change. Traditionally, this means that monuments strip the hero or event of historical complexities and condense the subject’s significance to a few patriotic lessons frozen for all time.’¹³³

He holds the opinion that 21st century monuments are now expected to be ‘spaces of experiences’ involving ‘journeys of emotional discovery’ rather than ‘closed’ objects of art.¹³⁴

2.2.8 The perspective of public art

As has been demonstrated in the introductory chapter and is confirmed by others, there is a ‘strong propensity to create physical monuments as a focus for commemoration.’¹³⁵ The fact that ritual places of commemoration are often marked by means of a monument implies a relation with the arts and, since we are speaking of monuments in the public area like streets, parks or graveyards, with public art.

¹³⁰ REVERDY: ‘L’image’ 6.

¹³¹ CASEY: ‘Public memory in the making’ 15.

¹³² SAVAGE: *Monument wars*.

¹³³ SAVAGE: *Monument wars* 10.

¹³⁴ SAVAGE: *Monument wars* 21.

¹³⁵ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture* 8.

This domain of public art is wide and vaguely demarcated, as Cameron Cartiere in *The practice of public art* states: ‘Under the vast umbrella of public art one finds permanent works, temporary works, political activism, service art, performance, earthworks, community projects, street furniture, monuments, memorials [...]’.¹³⁶ What ‘binds’ all these forms of art is their ‘spatiality’ and in particular their appearance in the public sphere. Public art resides outside museums and galleries and the ‘place’ of public art is essential as is argued by public art specialist Harriet Senie: ‘In public art, the site is the content.’¹³⁷

Art historian Cher Knight delineates public art’s basic criteria’s as follows: ‘Its works are designated for larger audiences, and placed to attract their attention; it intends to provide aesthetic experiences that edify, commemorate, entertain; and its messages are comprehensible to generalized audiences.’¹³⁸

A monument as defined in this study belongs to the field of public art as in general these criteria will be fulfilled. ‘Emotional and intellectual access to its viewers’ are both essential in public art.¹³⁹

According to Harriet Senie, three basic questions are relevant regarding the ‘quality’ of public art.¹⁴⁰ A first question relates, of course, to the question whether it is a good work of art according to its type. This criterion will have to be valued against art-historical criteria and will be outside the scope of this project.

A second question relates to whether the public art object improves or ‘energize its site in some way – by providing an aesthetic experience or seating (or both) or prompting conversation or social awareness.’ The relation between the object of art and its audience, people visiting for memorial reasons, will be investigated in this project.

And last, a third question relates to how the audience is engaged with public art. This question refers in this project to engagement of the monument in commemoration rituals.

According to Senie, ‘successful’ public art has to score on all three criteria, maybe it could be stated that a ‘successful’ monument also has to score on these three criteria. This issue will be elaborated on more in detail with regard to the interaction between the monument and its audience in this project.

There might be a difference in the meaning of the monument in daily practice when it is only a piece of public art, and meaning produced during the yearly commemoration. Also, the meaning of a monument may change over the years as it is depending on the interaction with the visitors. The focus of this project is on the interactive and dialogical ‘quality’ of the monument. Meaning results from this dialogue and will be in depth investigated in the four case studies.

¹³⁶ CARTIERE: ‘Coming in from the cold: a public art history’ 9.

¹³⁷ SENIE: ‘Responsible criticism: evaluating public art’.

¹³⁸ KRAUSE KNIGHT: *Public art. Theory, practice and populism* 22.

¹³⁹ KRAUSE KNIGHT: *Public art. Theory, practice and populism* 23.

¹⁴⁰ SENIE: ‘Responsible criticism: evaluating public art’.

To conclude the discussion on the first key concept ‘monument’:

Monuments are dependent on audiences for whatever memory, emotion, thought or feeling they produce as a result of the interaction. These audiences may consist of different groups, ranging from people ‘not involved and not knowing’ to people ‘involved and knowing’ about the background of what is visualized by means of the monument.

Recuber in his study on digital memory banks mentions the nowadays accepted ‘requirement’ of a therapeutic component with regard to monument culture. He describes, in line with the conclusions of Kirk Savage, the example of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial which he declares the ‘inauguration’ and the ‘ideal’ example of the therapeutic monument: ‘This monument aimed to help individuals and the nation as a whole heal the psychic wounds inflicted by the Vietnam conflict, rather than simply honoring soldiers or making a political statement.’¹⁴¹ This idea, with an accent on survivors and ordinary citizens, has been applied to the creation of many subsequent monuments. The Vietnam memorial with its wall of names has become to represent a:

‘Turning point in the history of public memory, a decisive departure from the anonymity of a traditional monument, like for instance the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington DC, and a growing acknowledgement that everyone now deserves equal recognition at all times in wholly accessible places.’¹⁴²

Gillis calls the Vietnam Memorial an ‘event’ where every visitor does his ‘duty’ to commemorate in some way, very much in contrast with the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier where visitors confine themselves to a role of spectator only taking pictures and not moving toward the event.

These observations illustrate how the concept ‘monument’ has evolved in the course of time.

2.3 Second key concept: ritual commemoration practices

2.3.1 Introduction

Associated to the current ‘memory boom’, a widespread desire to commemorate is also observed and object of discussion within the field of ritual studies.¹⁴³ Paul Post in his analytical approach on sacred fields distinguishes a separate zone on memory culture in which ritual dynamics takes place with a focus on commemorative rituals.¹⁴⁴ In this respect ‘sacred’ is understood as ‘set apart’, as stated by Mathew Evans.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ RECUBER: ‘The presumption of commemoration’; SAVAGE: ‘Trauma, healing and the therapeutic monument’; STURKEN: *Tangled memories*.

¹⁴² GILLIS: ‘Memory and identity’ 13.

¹⁴³ HUYSEN: *Twilight memories* 6; HUYSEN: *Presents pasts* 3.

¹⁴⁴ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture*.

¹⁴⁵ EVANS: ‘The sacred: differentiating, clarifying, and extending concepts’.

‘The field appears to be of crucial importance when it comes to ritual dynamics and the new design of ritual places,’ according to Post.¹⁴⁶ There is innovation, creativity but also debate, for instance related to new groups or events which are the object of commemoration rituals.¹⁴⁷ As of the 1980s, new commemoration rituals for different events emerged.¹⁴⁸

In this paragraph monuments as emerging ritual places will be discussed with a focus on the meaning of these ritual places.

2.3.2 Rituals

As already made clear in the introduction of this chapter, a ritual may be defined as a ‘more or less repeatable sequence of action units which, take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization and their situation in place and time.’¹⁴⁹

One of the pioneers in ritual studies, Ronald Grimes, does not focus on a definition but has defined a list of what he calls ‘qualities of ritual.’ They are characteristic of ritual and are ‘the indicators that begin to appear when action moves in the direction of ritual.’¹⁵⁰ According to Grimes, a ritual is not a ‘what’, not a ‘thing’. Grimes calls a ritual a ‘how’, a quality of which there are degrees.¹⁵¹ Defining ritual in qualities relevant to this project leads to the following observations: rituals are performed, formalized, repetitive, collective, valued highly or ultimately, deeply felt, sentiment-laden, meaningful, serious, condensed and multi-layered.

With regard to disaster ritual, but also relating to other commemoration ritual, Post *et al.* specifically mention the discharge or coping quality or dimension of rituals. This relates to the ‘meaningful’ quality as mentioned by Grimes. They can assist in ‘channeling feelings and emotions.’ Through meditation and orientation they may provide cohesion and order.¹⁵² Dutch ritual specialist Gerard Lukken describes, besides the discharging function, also a therapeutic dimension: all ritual is aimed to bring salvation and healing.¹⁵³ In his elaboration on commemoration rituals, Casey specifies their function as follows: ‘commemoration can even be viewed as a way of coming to terms with the absence [...]’.¹⁵⁴ This aspect of ‘coming to terms’ is also mentioned by Van Uden and Pieper. From the perspective of coping, rituals have two principal functions: channeling of emotions and offering a framework for interpretation.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁶ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture* 8.

¹⁴⁷ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture* 29.

¹⁴⁸ POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual*; MARGRY & SÁNCHEZ-CARRETERO (eds.): *Grassroots memorials*.

¹⁴⁹ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture* 18.

¹⁵⁰ GRIMES: *Ritual criticism* 10-11.

¹⁵¹ GRIMES: *Ritual criticism* 10.

¹⁵² POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual* 41.

¹⁵³ LUKKEN: *Rituelen in overvloed*.

¹⁵⁴ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological Study* 256.

¹⁵⁵ VAN UDEN & PIEPER: ‘Knockin’ on heaven’s door’ 11.

The aspect of emotions is studied in depth by Dutch psychologist Nico Frijda. Frijda elaborates on the working and impact of emotions in *The laws of emotion*.¹⁵⁶ He tries to find explanations for today's 'urge' for rituals and emotions involved, in particular with regard to the Second World War. Why is it that so many people wish to participate in commemoration rituals, especially in organized ceremonies and even long time after the Second World War?

He observes that these events still cause many emotions although the events took place long time ago. In this respect he cites a poem by novel writer and Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi which refers to the always returning agony of the camp experiences:

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns;
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns¹⁵⁷

Emotions stay because people have had experiences which cannot be undone. Frijda calls this the 'law of emotional momentum'.¹⁵⁸ He explains this law as follows. Emotional facts and events retain their power to call up emotions no matter how much time has passed, unless these emotions are opposed by frequent exposure which enables extinction or habituation as far as possible. Time does not heal the wounds, it only softens the scars. Sometimes emotions long time hidden may pop up as strong as ever before. Questions about what has happened remain and as a consequence people continue to look for answers, significance and meaning. Commemoration rituals may help in this respect although to confront oneself during commemoration with these occurring emotions seems ambiguous. Frijda calls the appropriation of the past the essence of commemoration. The function of commemoration rituals may be to create order and stability. Being together with other 'victims' during a commemoration ritual may contribute to objectify the events of the past. It will broaden the scope of the individual and his feelings. There will be others with similar emotions and this solidarity may help in coping with the emotions, as is also stated by Van Uden and Pieper.¹⁵⁹

In an interview in a journal he elaborates on his own experiences with emotions and war trauma.¹⁶⁰ Originating from a Jewish family, he lost both his father and brother in the Second World War. He himself had to go into hiding. After the war it was impossible for him to speak about his experiences and emotions. He states that after disasters such as the Second World War there seems to be only one option and that is to repress emotions: 'It is either to limp through life, or go on one leg.'¹⁶¹ If one

¹⁵⁶ FRIJDA: *The laws of emotion* 283-305.

¹⁵⁷ LEVI: *Collected poems* (London, 1988), also in LEVI: *The drowned and the saved*. This poem is originally part of *The rime of the ancient mariner*, written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, available online: www.gutenberg.org/files/151/151-h/151-h.htm, accessed April 9, 2013.

¹⁵⁸ FRIJDA: *The laws of emotion* 14-15; FRIJDA: *De wetten der emoties* 27.

¹⁵⁹ VAN UDEN & PIEPER: 'Knockin' on heaven's door' 11.

¹⁶⁰ LO GALBO: 'Ga je mank door het leven of op één been?'

¹⁶¹ LO GALBO: 'Ga je mank door het leven of op één been?'

chooses to suppress emotions, this will offer a relative emotional ease and safety but at the same time life will not be fulfilled and there will be loneliness and tension with your closest family and friends. It means that you will go through life as an amputee on one leg. Frijda holds the opinion that if one faces his deepest emotions, it will be a life in which one limps on both diseased legs. Nothing will really help, Frijda believes that it is a myth that he himself will be able to cope with his sorrow; the consequences of losing his family cannot be undone. He describes himself as a paper that has been wrinkled and will never be smooth again.

However, ritual commemoration practices at the site of a monument may contribute to learning how to handle non-coped, emotional affairs. Frijda explains how this worked out for himself when he and one of his sons paid a visit to the Yad Vashem monument in Israel:

‘I started to cry, unintentionally. My son said nothing, just put a hand on my arm. From that moment on, we were in contact and we have a warm relationship. In emails he calls me ‘father’. Apparently it was important to him to see my emotions. This opened a window to my emotional life. In this respect commemoration rituals may contribute to learning how to handle emotional affairs that have not been coped with. They may bring parents and children together in created, safe circumstances.’¹⁶²

Frijda still finds it difficult to talk about his experiences during the war but he knows he can transmit his emotions in, what he calls, a ‘sterilized’ form of ritual or a visit to the site of disaster.¹⁶³

This reference to emotions is also made by Jay Winter in his work on memory culture of the First World War. Winter states that war monuments serve as a place of gathering for people who wish to commemorate and calls these places: ‘Sites of memory, sites of mourning’, ‘places where people grieved, both individually and collectively.’¹⁶⁴ In his opinion these sites would change in character after ‘the moment of initial bereavement had passed’, meaning that, for example war memorials, were bound to change when time passes by. They cannot have a ‘fixed’ meaning. Like many other public objects they would change from active to inactive: their initial charge was related to the needs of bereaved people who lost relatives in the war. However, in the course of time: ‘the wounds began to close and life went on.’¹⁶⁵ After years or decades, other meanings may be attached to them or no meaning at all and thus they may become ‘artefacts of a vanished age.’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² ‘Daar ben ik, zonder dat het mijn bedoeling was, gaan huilen. Dat gebeurt. Mijn zoon zei niks, maar legde zijn hand op mijn arm. Vanaf dat moment dateert ons contact en hebben wij een warme band. In mailtjes noemt hij mij nu ‘vader’. Kennelijk was het voor hem belangrijk om mijn emoties te zien. Het opende een deurtje naar mijn gevoelsleven. Zo zie je dat herdenkingsrituelen kunnen bijdragen aan het leren omgaan met onverwerkte, emotionele gebeurtenissen. Ze kunnen ouders en kinderen bij elkaar brengen in gecreëerde, veilige omstandigheden’ in LO GALBO: ‘Ga je mank door het leven of op één been?’

¹⁶³ LO GALBO: ‘Ga je mank door het leven of op één been?’

¹⁶⁴ WINTER: *Sites of memory, sites of mourning* 79.

¹⁶⁵ WINTER: *Sites of memory, sites of mourning* 98.

¹⁶⁶ WINTER: *Sites of memory, sites of mourning* 98.

It is obvious that Frijda holds a different opinion on the meaning and importance of commemoration at the site of a monument. The ongoing ‘popularity’ of Second World War monuments and commemorating ceremonies as described in detail by Rob van Ginkel in his work on Second World War commemoration culture also appears to be in contrast with the observations of Winter.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, other tragedies and disasters may be yearly commemorated at fixed dates, like their anniversary and at the site of a monument.

In terms of Grimes, these commemorations rituals are ‘valued highly’, ‘deeply felt’, ‘condensed’, and ‘repetitive’. Because of the dynamics of these rituals, these monuments will not be in danger of becoming ‘artefacts of a vanished age.’

2.3.3 Commemoration rituals

Commemoration ceremonies usually take place at a dedicated place and time. Well known is of course a group commemoration ceremony at a public place, for instance at the side of a monument. Commemoration in this respect has its own ritual repertoire. Casey describes the ‘formal’ features of commemoration ritual: reflection, reference to the commemorated event or person, bodily action, and collective participation in the ritualistic action.¹⁶⁸

Usual elements are speeches reflecting the event(s) or (deceased) person(s), wreath laying, a minute of silence, music, songs or poetry. In describing a Memorial Day commemoration ceremony which he attended, Edward Casey wonders what exactly commemoration is.¹⁶⁹ In his view, a ‘crucial component of the answer to this question has to do with the role of *others* – my companions in commemoration.’¹⁷⁰ During a commemoration ceremony, participants are remembering with one another: some may have a direct remembering and a personal connection to the event or person(s) remembered, others may have an absence of recollection in this respect.

As a ‘guiding thread’ to defining what commemoration is, Casey elaborates on definitions from the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966) and the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In older editions of these dictionaries, ‘commemoration’ was explained as ‘an intensified remembering’ through for instance the deliverance of a formal eulogy or participation in a liturgical service.¹⁷¹ The word ‘commemoration’ derives from the Latin verb *commemorare*. ‘Com’ refers to being ‘altogether’ while *memorare* means: ‘relate’.¹⁷² According to Casey ‘[...] in acts of commemoration remembering is intensified by taking place *through* the interposed agency of a text [...] and *in* the setting of a social ritual [...].’¹⁷³ Casey asserts that both ritual and text become effective and are intensified in the

¹⁶⁷ VAN GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 740.

¹⁶⁸ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 222-223.

¹⁶⁹ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 216.

¹⁷⁰ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 216.

¹⁷¹ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 217.

¹⁷² Oxford Dictionaries, accessed on line: www.oxforddictionaries.com, accessed June 4, 2013.

¹⁷³ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 216-223.

company of other participants with whom the commemoration takes place in a public ritual commemorative practice. In this respect commemoration becomes a very much mediated affair.

Casey differentiates between *commemorabilia* and the *commemorandum*. *Commemorabilia* are the 'specific commemorative vehicles such as rituals or texts' and *commemorandum* is that which is being commemorated.¹⁷⁴ The two primary forms of concrete *commemorabilia* are according to Casey: ritual and text. They form the basis of what Casey calls: 'remembering-through'.

Casey mentions three relevant aspects with regard to commemoration rituals: commemoration rituals are solemn, they have the intention to memorialize and to endure.

Solemnization means, of course, that the past is taken seriously and that the appropriate ceremonies are held: 'Commemorating solemnizes by communalizing in a ceremony.'¹⁷⁵ A commemoration ceremony is an essentially interpersonal action: '[...] It is undertaken not only in relation *to* others and *for* them but also *with* them in a common action of communalizing – as I witnessed on Memorial Day [...],' says Casey. Commemoration comes to 'completeness in the co-action and compresence of ceremony.'¹⁷⁶

Regarding memorialisation, Casey emphasizes in particular the honouring aspect. Honouring consists of two closely connected actions: paying fitting tribute and paying tribute in a lasting way. Honouring seeks to '*preserve* and *stabilize* the memory of the honouree, and to do so in a time-binding, invariant manner.'¹⁷⁷ Regarding this aspect of 'lasting' it is of no surprise, according to Casey, that many memorials are constructed of stone: the hardness of granite or marble concretizes the wish to continue honouring into the future. At the same time, a memorial in stone, like a tombstone, a memorial plaque, or a sculpted figure, means a public presence and audience, in this respect the past is linked to the present, according to Casey:

'Memorialization through ritualized activity shares with stolid monuments an attachment to place, being enacted in an appropriate (or at least acceptable) arena of action [...] this *together* is strictly spatio-temporal; a given ritual brings together its enactors *during* one time as well as *at* one place, a time and place of shared assembly. Memorializing is accomplished – the past is concretely honored – by *taking action together*.'¹⁷⁸

The last aspect of commemoration discussed by Casey refers to perdurance.

Casey explains 'perdurance' as the concrete form assumed by the lastingness aimed at in memorialisation, perdurance is enduring-through such an encounter, and it is the most characteristic temporal form of a ritual transmitting a tradition:

¹⁷⁴ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 216-223.

¹⁷⁵ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 225.

¹⁷⁶ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 225-226.

¹⁷⁷ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 226.

¹⁷⁸ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 226-227.

‘In fact, the commemorating that is accomplished by a memorializing ritual is an especially efficacious remedy against time’s dispersive power [...] Furthermore, it is through perdurance that the past, present, and future dimensions of commemorative ritual are at once affirmed and made compatible with each other. In the lastingness achieved by such ritual the past to which tribute is being paid is allowed to endure – to last as coming toward us – through the present of the commemorative act and onward into the future as well.’¹⁷⁹

This appears to be a strong argument and a plea for commemorative ritual at a postponed monument because first the *past* figures as the primary temporal locus of what is remembered. The *commemorative* concerns the past and what is honoured and memorialized is the survival of the memory. This is in particular the case regarding postponed monuments.

Secondly, the *present* forms part of memorialisation in two ways: first, it is always and only in the present that we honour the past; second, the ritual itself is devised to manage our attention and activities. Thirdly, the *future* is also implicated by recurrence of the ritual in the future:

‘On the other hand, a genuinely commemorative ritual is exhortatory in nature; it calls to us from a certain indefinite future as if to say: ‘I will be constant in my own permanency: will you, in ritualistic recognition of this, be constant in your commemoration of what I honor?’ It also calls to others, yet unborn, who will hopefully draw inspiration from the same ritual as it comes to be re-enacted.’¹⁸⁰

All three temporal modes of perdurance are operative in memorialisation and commemoration as becomes evident in the text inscribed on for example a Civil War monument in the United States town of Green, as described by Casey:

In memory
Of the men of Guildford
Who fell
And in honor of those who served
In the war of the union
The grateful town erects this monument
That their example may speak to coming generation

‘Fell’ and ‘served’ refer to the events in the past, the first temporal mode of the past. ‘The grateful town erects this monument’ refers to the present which relates to the second temporal mode of the

¹⁷⁹ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 229.

¹⁸⁰ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 230.

present. The last phrase of the text ‘that their example may speak to coming generations’, refers to the future, being the third temporal mode which is the future.

Casey poses the question if there is a difference between a text and a ritual, and how should we consider the role of texts in commemorative actions. In one form or another, a text figures even in the most common cases of commemoration. In Casey’s words: everywhere we look we find ritualistic acts and stolid monuments intimately conjoined with words. Referring to his definition of commemoration, based on the *Oxford English Dictionary*; commemoration is ‘the action of calling to remembrance [...]’. Casey states that this implies that there is ‘no commemoration without calling, which occurs in and through language,’ for example the ritual of calling the names of the victims during a commemoration ceremony.¹⁸¹

Casey suggests that the remembering-through which lies at the basis of commemoration is always remembering through a text: ritual, ‘ritual-cum-text’, must include text as well as bodily action if it is to be adequate to the complex tasks of commemoration: ‘[...] commemoration is at the same time discursive: that is to say, a matter of language, dependent upon language and taking place *through* language.’¹⁸² In line with Carrier language, that is words, but also symbols are essential in a monument. As already discussed here above, Carrier defines a monument as: ‘a social process, and as a meeting of symbols and words.’¹⁸³ In this respect, monuments may be interpreted and evaluated like texts (words) and symbols and need to be evaluated with regard to the message they convey and the dialogue which will be engaged with the audience during ritual commemoration practices.

To conclude the discussion on the second key concept:

Being together with others during a commemoration ceremony, as described by Frijda, is an important feature of postponed monuments. In this respect, commemoration rituals will be ‘meaningful’ and have ‘multilayered’ qualities. In particular the coping qualities of commemoration rituals will be explored in this project.

Casey has emphasized in his work the temporal modes of commemoration. Past, present, and future and different modes of operation, either in ritual practices at the site of a monument, in the form or symbolism of a monument, or through the text on a monument, as described by Casey, will be focused on in the case studies on postponed monuments.

¹⁸¹ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 232.

¹⁸² CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 232-233.

¹⁸³ CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 22.

2.4 Third key concept: place

2.4.1 Introduction

The site of the monument may be ‘the place where it all happened,’ a site of trauma, for instance Ground Zero being the site of the attacks of 9/11, or a neutral place, for instance the Oosterpark in Amsterdam, the site of the slavery monument, the Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden.

Literally and symbolically speaking, the site of a monument is transformed by erection of the monument. There is a difference between the location of the monument *before* and *after* erection of the monument. As stated by Paul Post, ‘place matters,’ very often it is a place which directs rituality and in our present society, ritual or a sacred place has become an important theme.¹⁸⁴

In the following paragraphs I will discuss the ‘place’ of a monument as a locus for ritual commemorative practices.

2.4.2 Monument, place and space

In this project a (postponed) monument as a performed act of ‘memory’, constitutes the connection between a person or an event in the past, and ‘place’, the locus of the monument in the present. In addition, ritual practices reinforce this bond between memory and place. We may call this a ‘productive’ category, a mental space, as suggested by Henri Lefebvre.¹⁸⁵ In his concept the interference of place, ritual and representation is central. Place and space are always ‘productive’ categories and never static as they influence each other in a dialectic relationship. With regard to monuments, they seem to create their own space which is more than just the site, because in the interaction with the audience, thoughts, memories, emotions are roused.

In addition Casey emphasizes the ‘intimate and profound’ relationship between ‘memory’ and ‘place’: ‘a memory is often either of a place itself (e.g., of one’s childhood home) or of an event or person *in* a place [...]’.¹⁸⁶ In line with the Greek philosopher and scientist of the Pythagorean school Archytas, Casey states that ‘All existing things are either in place or not without place.’¹⁸⁷ As a heuristic understanding of place and following the Archytian axiom ‘Place is the first of all things’, Casey takes the view that place is prior to space and argues that besides Archytas and Aristotle, also Bachelard, and Heidegger ‘have reembraced the conviction’.¹⁸⁸ As an essential trait of places, Casey states that ‘places gather’, for instance experiences, histories, languages, and thoughts: ‘Think only what it means to go back to a place you know, finding it full of memories and expectations, old things and new things, the familiar and the strange [...] The power belongs to place itself and it is a power of gathering.’¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ POST: *Voorbij het kerkgebouw* 76-83.

¹⁸⁵ LEFEBVRE: *The production of space*.

¹⁸⁶ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 183.

¹⁸⁷ CASEY: *Getting back into place* 317.

¹⁸⁸ CASEY: *Getting back into place* 319.

¹⁸⁹ CASEY: *Getting back into place* 327-328.

Casey does not consider a place to be ‘something simply physical’: a place is more like an ‘event’.¹⁹⁰ According to Casey: ‘Rather than being one definite sort of thing – for example, physical, spiritual, cultural, social – a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they happen.’¹⁹¹ Although Casey does not discuss the concepts of space as defined by Lefebvre in depth, this observation means that places are also productive categories in line with Lefebvre’s concept of spaces as productive categories.¹⁹²

This aspect of ‘event’ also refers to the use of the terms ‘space’ and ‘places’ by Michel de Certeau, whom Casey neither discusses. In *The practice of everyday life*, the French scholar Michel de Certeau discusses the distinction between ‘place’ and ‘space’. Place may be understood as a kind of locus, specifically as a place which is ‘the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationship of coexistence.’¹⁹³ Space, on the other hand, is rather geography constituted by dynamic elements which meet, intersect, cross each other, or diverge. De Certeau phrases it as follows: ‘Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.’¹⁹⁴ De Certeau’s well-known example is the street: a street is a place that is transformed by a walker into an active space. Another example forms a text. A text may be understood as a locus, a place, of ‘organized signs obeying the logic of a proper place that every reader can turn into an intellectual or aesthetic space of learning and enjoyment.’ De Certeau speaks in this respect of ‘practiced place’, something which is different and is not comparable in relation to dynamics with ‘the law of the proper’ which rules in the place. In the interaction with the audience, the place of a monument becomes a ‘practiced place’. When ‘used’ for commemoration, this practiced place becomes an active space for memorial activities.

If a monument has been placed in the public area, street, square, park, the intention is to reach with its interpretation the general public and they will thus both denote the past events and evoke interpretations of events in the present.¹⁹⁵ Thus a ‘practiced place’ will be created as all kind of activities take place which may not only be restricted to remembering and commemoration as is shown by Michalski in his example of the Marx-Engels Memorial in Berlin (1986) by the German sculptor Ludwig Englehardt (1924-2001). He makes the following observations regarding this memorial: ‘The realized work shows the two thinkers standing or sitting demurely on a low, almost indiscernible pedestal. They are available to anyone to touch, and children were permitted to play around them.’ The

¹⁹⁰ CASEY: *Getting back into place* 329.

¹⁹¹ CASEY: *Getting back into place* 330.

¹⁹² In the introduction to the second edition of his latest book *Getting back into place. Towards a renewed understanding of the place – world* (Indianapolis 2009), Casey discusses briefly Lefebvre’s analysis of spatial relations in *The production of space* in footnote 5 (p. 369): ‘[...] in this book, place is everywhere implied even if only rarely thematized’.

¹⁹³ DE CERTEAU: *The practice of everyday life* 117.

¹⁹⁴ DE CERTEAU: *The practice of everyday life* 117.

¹⁹⁵ CARRIER: *Holocaust monuments and national memory cultures* 36.

memorial and its circumjacent space are available for other activities next to remembering Marx and Engels. Michalski calls this a 'trademark' of public sculpture and emphasizes in this respect its spatial character.¹⁹⁶ Prime objective of a monument should be remembering and commemoration but in the course of time the 'order' of the 'place' of the monument may be disturbed by other activities as illustrated by Michalski. The place of the monument is thus transformed into a 'practiced place', and an 'active space' in which all kinds of activities, not limited to memorial rituals, may arise.

2.4.3 Monuments and the place 'where it all happened'

Edward Linenthal in his work on the terrorist bombing of an Oklahoma government building, *The unfinished bombing, Oklahoma City in American memory*, states that 'contemporary American memorial culture is characterized by the democratization of memorials and memorial processes.'¹⁹⁷ Memorials are democratized by transforming them for example through spontaneous acts of leaving items at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or at the fence around the perimeter of the area where the Murray Building once stood in Oklahoma City. The memorial's process involved hundreds of people; their therapeutic 'quality' was to help the community engage the traumatic impact of the bombing. Linenthal refers to how monuments incite rituals which help in coping with emotions.

In Oklahoma City, the site of the monument is at the same time a place of trauma; a place where tragic events took place and thus a place 'assigned' to commemoration.

Following the line of argumentation of the French historian Pierre Nora, who coined the term *lieux de mémoire*, a place of trauma may be considered as a place of commemoration and a place of remembrance.¹⁹⁸ These 'places of memory' are *lieux* in 'three senses of the word – material, symbolic, and functional.'¹⁹⁹ Nora elaborates on the following examples. A purely material site like an archive may become a *lieu de mémoire* if a symbolic quality is added through imagination. A purely functional site, like a veteran's reunion becomes a *lieu de mémoire* when it becomes also the object of a ritual. The observance of a commemorative minute of silence, which offers a direct example of an entirely symbolic action, may be seen as a focused appeal on memory because the temporal continuity will be broken. Nora states that the three aspects always coexist: a material monument becomes a *lieu de mémoire* when reference is made to the symbolic characteristics which will be completed during the functional element of commemorative rituals. In Nora's words the fundamental purpose of a *lieu de mémoire* is to bring to time to a halt, to obstruct the work of forgetting, to create a certain state of matters and to commemorate death. In order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that a *lieu de mémoire* will only exist because of its capacity of metamorphosis.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ MICHALSKI: *Public monuments* 147.

¹⁹⁷ LINENTHAL: *The unfinished bombing* 5-6.

¹⁹⁸ NORA: 'Between memory and history'.

¹⁹⁹ NORA: 'Between memory and history' 18-19.

²⁰⁰ NORA: 'Between memory and history: *les lieux de mémoire*' 19.

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, this capacity for metamorphosis is also described by Kenneth Foote. He explores how and why, or not, Americans have memorialized the sites of tragic and violent events. In his work *Shadowed ground, America's landscapes of violence and tragedy*, Foote divides tragedy sites according to what happened to the site after the tragedy. He calls this distinction 'common outcomes for places associated with violence and tragedy' and distinguishes between the following 'outcomes':²⁰¹

- designation: a site is marked – something important happened here – but not sanctified;
- sanctification: a sacred place, set apart from its surroundings and dedicated to the memory of an event, person or group;
- rectification: a site is 'put right', repaired and reused;
- obliteration: active effacement of evidence of particularly shocking or shameful events.

According to Foote, these distinctions are not eternally set, changes may occur as time passes by.

A 'designated' site for instance may be marked with flowers, memorial notes or other remembrances to the victims thus creating a temporarily or ephemeral memorial which may be transformed into a permanent memorial at a later time. Designating the site accordingly often means, depending on the impact of the events that took place, a first step on the path toward sanctification.

In 1997, in his first edition of *Shadowed ground* but also in 2003 in its revised edition, Foote claims that 'Rectification is the rule for the vast majority of sites touched by tragedy and violence.'²⁰² This assertion is contradicted by Linenthal in his work on the memorial site in Oklahoma City. According to Linenthal one can speak of a compression of time between the event and memorial planning and of a 'rise of activist memorial environments.' He grounds these assertions on his study of the memorial rituals in Oklahoma City after the bombing took place in 1995. He observed a fierce desire to erect a public memorial, and this revealed a 'dramatic transformation in the way the culture treated sites of mass murder.'²⁰³ Obliteration and rectification, as meant and coined by Foote, did not hold true in Oklahoma City,²⁰⁴ nor does it nowadays in other places of trauma, like for instance Ground Zero after 9/11 in New York. This means that 'rectification', the situation in which a site is 'put right', repaired and reused is probably not any longer 'by far the most common outcome' as stated by Foote.²⁰⁵

A place sanctified with a monument may accordingly acquire a sanctified or a sacred status. According to Chidester and Linenthal in their introduction on *American sacred space*, the production of sacred space may be characterized as follows:²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ FOOTE: *Shadowed ground* 7-35; FOOTE: 'Shadowed ground, sacred place' 93-119.

²⁰² FOOTE: *Shadowed ground* 23.

²⁰³ LINENTHAL: *The unfinished bombing* 5.

²⁰⁴ LINENTHAL: *The unfinished bombing* 5.

²⁰⁵ FOOTE: 'Shadowed ground, sacred place' 96.

²⁰⁶ CHIDESTER & LINENTHAL: 'Introduction' 1-42.

- sacred space is ritualized space: a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances;²⁰⁷
- sacred space is significant space;²⁰⁸
- sacred space is contested space.²⁰⁹

In addition to Foote, ritual is a defining feature of sacralisation. Both Foote and Linenthal agree that sacred space is a significant space: a site, orientation, or set of relations subject to interpretation.

In this project the question whether a monument is a sacred space depends on the interpretation and the meaning of the public. This attribution and appropriation of sacred space takes place in the interaction of the public with the ‘practiced place’ of the monument.

Two observations seem to be relevant with regard to Foote’s list of ‘outcomes’.

A first observation relates to Foote’s outcome ‘designation’. I would like to add to this outcome the possibility of preserving the place as it was just after the tragedy took place. We might call this addition ‘authentic’, referring to maintaining the site of the tragedy as it was right after the tragic event, maybe temporarily, but this period may be prolonged for a longer time. A relevant example in this respect is, for instance, Ground Zero, the site of the Twin Towers in New York. The site of the disaster remained for a long time in a state of rubble, thus creating a *lieu de mémoire*, the place itself in that way transforming into a memorial to mourn the lost. A lot of victims were in fact ‘buried’ there before the remains could be salvaged. The site was actually a ‘graveyard’ at the same time.

A second example may offer Second World War concentration camps where the originally barracks, like in Auschwitz are still in place. This offers a combination of ‘sanctification’ and ‘authenticity’.

A third example is offered by memorials that incorporate relics of the time of the event into a newly erected memorial. Like for instance at the Oklahoma City National Memorial, where the Survivor Tree, a tree which endured the disaster, is integrated into the memorial honouring and remembering the victims of the bombing of a building in 1995. The tree became a symbol of ‘resilience and endurance’, and a sacred object and also a gathering place for family members and survivors on important occasions.²¹⁰ A similar approach was taken in the New York 9/11 Ground Zero memorial, where a pear tree which survived, was taken care of in a nursery before it was replanted as a part of the memorial. The official book of the National September 11 memorial, *A place of remembrance*, describes the tree as ‘a reminder of the thousands of survivors who persevered after the attacks.’²¹¹ A Dutch example is in Amsterdam, at the monument Bijlmerramp (Bijlmer crash, 1996). The ‘Tree that saw everything’ has been integrated in the permanent monument.

²⁰⁷ CHIDESTER & LINENTHAL: ‘Introduction’ 9.

²⁰⁸ CHIDESTER & LINENTHAL: ‘Introduction’ 12.

²⁰⁹ CHIDESTER & LINENTHAL: ‘Introduction’ 15.

²¹⁰ LINENTHAL: *The unfinished bombing* 171-174.

²¹¹ BLAIS & RASIC: *A place of remembrance* 208.

A second additional observation relates to Foote's outcome 'sanctification'. Nowadays, 'sanctified' places (monuments) may be destructed or altered due to a change in political regime or change in opinion on the place. Levinson states that 'Those who overthrow regimes often take as one of their first tasks the physical destruction of symbols – and the latent power possessed by these markers – of those whom they have displaced.'²¹² In Iraq, after the fall of Saddam Hussein his statues were toppled down as a sign of the destruction of his regime.²¹³ In the Netherlands an example of an altered monument is for example the Van Heutsz monument as described in Chapter 1. Changes in political regime or changes in opinion on political history often bring with them changes in the organization of public space.²¹⁴

To conclude the discussion on the third key concept:

Casey emphasizes the 'intimate and profound' relationship between 'memory' and 'place' and following the Archytian axiom he considers place as 'the first of all things'. In the following case studies I will explore place as a locus for commemoration ritual practices and the need to erect a monument at a particular place for commemoration practices.

2.5 Postponed monuments: memory, place and time

After discussion of the key concepts 'monument', 'ritual commemoration practices', and 'place', I will resume my exploration of postponed monuments. This exploration will be continued throughout the case studies.

Postponed monuments are erected long time after the event(s). One of the objectives of this project is to learn more about what happened in-between the time of the event(s) and the time of erection of the monument, the initiatives and the meaning of these monuments. Memory of the event(s) or person(s), place(s) where it happened, and the reasons for erection of the monument are features which ask for in depth exploration.

Casey's 'model' of individual, social, collective and public memory seems to be relevant to postponed monuments because it describes a 'mechanism' through which individual or social memories are made public. This is precisely what seems to take place in the erection of postponed monuments: for a long time certain memories have been kept within a private circle. For reasons to explore, individuals, or groups of individuals, who share a certain memory, take the initiative to make this memory public by means of erecting a monument in public space. The terms individual, social, collective and public memory have been extensively described by other cultural memory scholars like Maurice Halb-

²¹² LEVINSON: *Written in stone* 12.

²¹³ GÖTTKE: *Toppled*.

²¹⁴ LEVINSON: *Written in stone* 10.

wachs,²¹⁵ Aleida and Jan Assmann,²¹⁶ and Astrid Erll.²¹⁷ I will restrict myself to discussion of the interpretation of the terms provided by Casey.

In the next paragraphs I will describe Casey's model of individual, social, collective and public memory.

2.5.1 Individual memory

Individual memory refers to the person who is engaged in memory: 'That person, always the unique rememberer, remembers in several particular ways, not just recollecting states of affairs (recalling *that* something happened) but also remembering-*how* (to do certain things), remembering-*as* [...].'²¹⁸ Casey states that the traits of individual memory cannot be kept apart from the traits of the remembering we do with, and through others: the primary locus of memory is found not only in the mind or in the brain, but also in the relationship with others. Remembering we do with, and through others are distinguishable but not separable dimensions of the same activity: '[...] every single act of remembering that I do comes saturated with social and collective aspects, as well as with cultural and public determinants, each such act has certain formal dimensions which exceed any individual's contribution.'²¹⁹ Casey continues that we remember by way of being reminded, by recognizing something, and by way of reminiscing with others. In communicating with others, through language, narrative and history are introduced into memory. Primary locus of memory is found not only in body or mind but in an intersubjective nexus that is at once social and collective.

2.5.2 Social memory

According to Casey, social memory is the memory held in common by those who are allied either by family ties, by geographical proximity in for example neighbourhoods, cities, or other regions, or by engagement in a common project. People had the same history, a common place in which that history was enacted and experienced, and suitable means of communication and expression of that history within their restricted group. These social memories may not be necessarily public, but they may become public property when they are shared in public.

Sharing memories may happen when people are assembled at a particular place, for instance a family dinner. It may also happen when two or more group members talk to each other on the telephone or when they communicate through social media like Facebook. Neither the exact location nor the technology matter, what matters are that they share the same history. This may also be through another family member.

²¹⁵ HALBWACHS: *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*; HALBWACHS: *The collective memory*; HALBWACHS: *On collective memory*.

²¹⁶ A. ASSMANN: *Erinnerungsräume*; A. ASSMANN: 'Canon and archive'; A. ASSMANN: 'Re-framing memory'; J. ASSMANN: 'Collective memory and cultural identity'; J. ASSMANN: 'Communicative and cultural memory.'

²¹⁷ ERLL: *Memory in culture*.

²¹⁸ CASEY: 'Public memory in place and time' 20.

²¹⁹ CASEY: 'Public memory in place and time' 20.

2.5.3 Collective memory

This term is defined by Casey as ‘the circumstance in which different persons, not necessarily known to each other at all, nevertheless recall the same event again, each in her own way. This is a case of remembering neither individually in isolation from others nor in the company of others with whom one is acquainted but “severally”.’²²⁰ According to Casey, in this respect ‘severally’ means plural remembering without a basis in shared memories or shared places. It is brought together by a conjoint remembrance of a certain event, no matter where those who remember are or how they are related to each other. The only thing that is relevant is unity of content. Casey mentions the phenomenon of ‘flashbulb memories’, what he calls the most ‘striking instance of collective remembering.’²²¹ An example of this phenomenon is for instance the events of 9/11: almost everybody will not only remember what happened that day, but also where he or she was that day. Collective memory means that those who are remembering, are remembering the same thing. In this respect, there is a difference with individual and social memory where the singularity of the person who remembers or the group of co-rememberers is relevant. Intimacy and bonding are important while they are not important in a collective situation, according to Casey.²²²

2.5.4 Public memory

Individual and social memory, as defined by Casey, contribute to public memory. Public, in this respect, means out in the open and where discussion with others is possible.

Individual remembering stays essential at the level of the experiential, social memory strengthens personal recollections by adding the outreach of group identities. Added to the personal experience are family histories and other shared experiences. In this respect, individual and social memory both together form the ‘inner circle’ of public memory.

Public memory is always enacted at a particular place. People meet and interact and this place may evoke certain memories. Place may also offer a site for congregation with a shared objective of commemoration. This commemoration in place, as already discussed above as key concept ‘Ritual commemoration practices’, is a remembering together, a recollection, achieved together in one and the same place. It points both backwards to the past, and forwards to the future.

At the same time, place subtends public memory, being the ground and the resource, the location and the scene of the remembering we do in common.

The process, through which public memory is involved, starts from within a particular historical event, often a calamity of some sort and in the form of an ‘inner horizon’, closely surrounding a particular thing or event that forms a ‘hearth’ (place or gathering) for the emerging memory. Public memory always involves a combination of time and place which form the external horizon and the spatio-

²²⁰ CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’ 23.

²²¹ CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’ 23.

²²² CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’ 23.

temporal framework. Place is part of public memory in the making (for instance grassroots memorials) and place remains central to a more fully consolidated public memory that has become a horizon for the future remembering of many others.

The above may be illustrated by the transformation of a traumatic site, for instance Ground Zero on 9/11, 2001, into a grassroots memorial place. This means the building of a public hearth as a first step to a *stabilitas loci* for further and future remembering. The ‘inner horizon’ of this hearth may gradually transform itself into an ‘outer horizon’ of public memory. The site may be designated by more permanent markers of date and place, and by a consolidated memorial ‘mass’, like a monument, which will retain the essence if not the detail of the events.

2.5.5 Postponed monuments as ‘media’ of memory

Edward Casey differentiates between *commemorabilia*, which are ‘specific commemorative vehicles such as rituals or texts’ and *commemorandum*, which relates to ‘that which I was commemorating’.²²³ Casey discusses the ‘power’ of monuments and considers them as ‘vehicles’ or *commemorabilia* in the public area. In his discussions he relates (public) memory and place to the past, present, and the future. These observations seem to be relevant to postponed monuments as I will explain hereafter.

Although the events took place a long time ago and many people will not have a direct relationship, these monuments, often erected long time after the events, make strong appeal to the general public. Casey states that depending on the *commemoranda* and the *commemorabilia* the distance in time and affiliation to the event(s) or person(s) does not matter:

‘The distance and the anonymity do not matter, thanks to the immanence of the *commemoranda* in the vehicles that sustain them. These vehicles make even the most alien presences available to me as commemorator, and they do so in the only way that matters. *Through* the appropriate *commemorabilia* I overcome the effects of anonymity and spatio-temporal distance and pay homage to people and events I have never known and will never know face-to-face.’²²⁴

In this respect, the emerging example of a relatively new type of monument may be mentioned: monuments to slavery, and to the abolition of slavery, like the one that was discussed in Chapter 1, the Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden (National Monument Slavery History, 2002, Oosterpark in Amsterdam), but other countries have erected similar type monuments.²²⁵ In these, postponed, monuments, past, present, and future are collectively joined in one particular place and an appeal is made to the public. Anonymity and spatio-temporal distance seem to be irrelevant.

²²³ CASEY: *Remembering. A Phenomenological Study* 217.

²²⁴ CASEY: *Remembering. A Phenomenological Study* 218.

²²⁵ www.ninsee.nl/nationaal-slavernijmonument, accessed March 20, 2013, but other countries like France, South Africa, and Puerto Rico also erected slavery monuments.

The (co) architect of the French Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery in Nantes,²²⁶ Julian Bonder, states that the word ‘memorial’ corresponds to ‘commemoration’. Commemoration relates to ‘something that serves to preserve memory or knowledge of an individual or an event.’ But it also corresponds to ‘memento’ and that means: ‘something that serves to warn or remind with regard to conduct or future events.’²²⁷ This liaison between past and future is also mentioned by Levinson: ‘to commemorate is to take a stand, to declare the reality of heroes (or heroic events) worthy of emulation or, less frequently, that an event that occurred at a particular place was indeed so terrible that it must be remembered forever as a cautionary note.’²²⁸

In this respect, Claudia Koonz states in her work on the preservation of Nazi extermination camps that the Germans distinguish between, in the first place a *Denkmal*, which is a monument meant to memorialize a person or an event: ‘Pause. Stop and think’, a *Denkmal* conveys that meaning.²²⁹ In the second place, Koonz mentions a *Mahnmal*, which serves in principal as a public reminder that acts as a warning. In third place comes a *Gedenkstätte*, which is a place in which important events can be meditated.²³⁰ According to Casey, time and place adjoin through these media of memory. A *Denkmal* ‘looks back’ to what already took place. A *Gedenkstätte* invites visitors to reflect on the present while a *Mahnmal* asks the audience to be watchful in the future. All three temporal modes not only call for concrete ‘implacement’; ‘[...] each is already implaced in a particular scene, a given site, a scene or site in which we can truly say that *public memory takes the time to take place*...’²³¹ Casey calls the spatio-temporality a specific trait of public memory:

‘Public memory is radically bivalent in its temporality: Other modes of remembering deal primarily with the past, with the exception of recognition, focused on the ingression of the past into the direct present, and reminding, which often projects us into a future event of which we wish to be remembered, public memory is both attached to a past (typically an originating event of some sort) and acts to ensure a future of further remembering of that same past.’²³²

In line with Casey, a postponed monument may be seen as a combination of these ‘temporal modes’ as they act as *commemorabilia* of the past and connect to the present and the future. They may involve aspects of ‘recognition’ and ‘reminding’, as illustrated in the example of slavery memorials and thus continue to connect with the present.

²²⁶ *Mémorial à l’abolition de l’esclavage* (dedicated March 2012), www.mémorial.nantes.fr/, accessed June 10, 2013.

²²⁷ BONDER: ‘On memory, trauma, public space, monuments, and memorials’.

²²⁸ LEVINSON: *Written in stone* 137.

²²⁹ KOONZ: ‘Between memory and oblivion’ 259.

²³⁰ KOONZ: ‘Between memory and oblivion.’

²³¹ CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’ 42; CASEY: ‘Public memory in the making’ 1.

²³² CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’ 17.

2.5.6 Postponed monuments and the current ‘memory boom’

As said and mentioned above, scholars emphasize the current fascination with memory.²³³ Many reasons are given for this widespread interest in memory. In a discussion of the background of this so called ‘memory boom’, the following aspects are mentioned, as already shortly mentioned in Chapter 1.²³⁴

First of all, there is a strong urge for the recovery of repressed memories of individuals, groups or nations, whose histories have been ignored, hidden or destroyed and for which at present recognition is sought.

Secondly comes a contemporary wide spread interest in genealogical research and family narratives which may be related to the just mentioned recognition of hidden or repressed memories.

Thirdly, a prevalent desire to commemorate, remember, and memorialize has been noticed which will probably also relate to the above, but maybe also to an increasing emphasis upon trauma, reconciliation, and apology.

Casey’s elaborations on memory are not a discussion or interpretation of the ‘memory boom’ but more an interpretation of public memory and how it ‘works’ in relation to individual memory. However, in my exploration of postponed monuments the abovementioned aspects of the current fascination with memory need to be integrated: are they relevant with regard to the erection of postponed monuments?

²³³ ERL: *Memory in culture* 3; HUYSEN: *Twilight memories* 6; HUYSEN: *Presents pasts* 3.

²³⁴ NORA: ‘Reasons for the current upsurge in memory’; GARDE-HANSEN: *Media and memory* 13-14.

Chapter 3

Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück

[...] a monument becomes a point of reference amid other parts of the landscape, one node among others in a topographical matrix that orients the rememberer and creates meaning in both the land and our recollections²³⁵

3.1 Introduction



Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück at the Museumplein, Amsterdam

3.1.1 First impression

Crossing the Museumplein in the centre of Amsterdam with the impressive Concertgebouw in the background, and the even impressive Rijksmuseum at the other site of the square, a non-figurative installation comes into view. This installation is made of stainless steel plates, which reflect sound and

²³⁵ YOUNG: *The texture of memory* 7.

light from the cylinder positioned in the middle. On a sunny day, tourists may be seen, relaxing on the platform, seemingly unaware of the meaning of this installation.

However, this installation is the monument in memory of concentration camp Ravensbrück. The monument was unveiled 30 years after liberation of the camp in 1975. Women's concentration camp Ravensbrück (1939-1945) was a concentration camp in Germany, located about 80 kilometers north of Berlin, near Fürstenberg.²³⁶ During the Second World War, Ravensbrück was a concentration camp where in particular women, but from 1941 also men, were imprisoned. It was especially designed for women, and in public memory the camp is most of the time remembered as a woman's camp.

Between 800 and 900 Dutch women, and about 300 Dutch men were sent to Ravensbrück.²³⁷ Every year, at the last Sunday of April, around the date of the liberation of the camp (April 30, 1945), a commemorative ceremony is held at the monument.

3.1.2 The monument

The monument consists of 11 plates, which are made of stainless steel and which are positioned in a half circle around a cylinder, also made of stainless steel. The diameter of the cylinder is 76 centimeters and its height is 4 meters. The width of the plates is 1.20 meters, and heights accrue from 2.40



meters up to 3.40 meters. Within the cylinder, 11 grooves allow bundles of light to reflect on the plates. Within the cylinder, light and sound equipment is installed. While the sound of a beat echoes from the cylinder, circulating flashes of light emerge from the grooves in the cylinder. Beat and sound slowly fade away. During the following silence all plates are illuminated at the same time with a rising and dying beam of light. Hereafter, the cycle starts over again. Cylinder and plates are positioned on a plateau of 9 to 7.50 meters. This plateau is made of natural stone.²³⁸

Stainless steel cylinder with grooves

²³⁶ Hereafter I will refer to 'Ravensbrück Concentration Camp' as: 'Ravensbrück'.

²³⁷ HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering*.

²³⁸ Description originates from: *Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh: 1 monument en 3 ontwerpers, het Ravensbrück monument*.

In black letters, the following text has been engraved on one of the plates: *vrouwen van ravenbrück 1940-1945* (women of ravenbrück 1940-1945). On the next plate is stated: *voor haar die tot het uiterste neen bleven zeggen tegen het fascisme* (to her who persevered to the utmost in saying no to fascism).

Text on stainless steel plates



In 2004, a plaque was placed on the back of the monument referring to the fact that also men and children were kept prisoner in Ravensbrück. This plaque holds the following wording: *1939-1945 Ter nagedachtenis aan de 90.000 vrouwen en kinderen en de 20.000 mannen die in het concentratiekamp Ravensbrück zijn omgebracht* (1939-1945 In remembrance of 90,000 women and children and 20,000 men who were killed in concentration camp Ravensbrück).

Memorial plaque in remembrance of the women, children and men who were killed in Ravensbrück



In 2013, this memorial plaque was removed and another memorial plaque, indicating the reference of the monument, was put at the front site of the monument. The text on this plaque is as follows: *Ter nagedachtenis aan de vrouwen, mannen en kinderen die zijn omgekomen in het concentratiekamp Ravensbrück 1939-1945* (In remembrance of the women, men and children who died in concentrationcamp Ravensbrück 1939-1945).

Memorial plaque at the front of the monument in 2013



Information on the monument and Ravensbrück may be accessed by visitors via an application on a mobile phone. This application ('app') was especially developed to provide information on war monuments to people when passing a Second World War monument.²³⁹

3.1.3 Museumplein Amsterdam

As said before, the monument is located at the Museumplein in Amsterdam. The Museumplein is a big square in the southern part of the centre of Amsterdam. In 1875 it was decided that Pierre J.H. Cuypers would be the architect of the Rijksmuseum. He designed a monumental building in neo gothic style which was opened for the public in 1885. The enormous building with its symmetrical sides and in the middle an underpass for traffic dominated also the terrain behind the museum. Soon these grounds were called the Museumterreinen.²⁴⁰ In 1888 and 1894 at the edges of the Museumplein, two other 'cultural temples', the Concertgebouw and the Stedelijk Museum were built. In 1902 Cuypers proposed not to build on these grounds. Since that time the square has been used for large-scale public events like music festivals, demonstrations and fairs.

Originally, in 1975 the monument was located at the western side of the Museumplein, in the vicinity of the Van Gogh Museum. In 1990 there were strong feelings that Cuypers' ideas about the public function of the square had not been effected. The square had not become the city square which he envisioned at the time. Main reason appeared to be the road which divided the square in two, and many cars and busses parked in the streets, both prohibiting the square to function as a real square. In 1992 the following criteria were accepted by the city council: an open and pleasant area, suitable for public manifestations, motorized traffic should be banned. Based on these criteria, the well-known Swedish born landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson was commissioned to develop a so called master plan. Andersson was the architect of the square Le Parvis de la Défense in Paris and also of the restructuring of the Karlsplatz in Vienna.²⁴¹ Taking into account in his plans were new extensions of the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk Museum. As a consequence, the monument had to be moved. In 1996 the monument was moved to the other side of the square and also the technical installation had to be moved from the Van Gogh Museum. It was built into the cylinder of the monument.

The monument is now located at the east side of the square, behind two rows of linden trees and near a garden of flowers. A quiet, park like atmosphere was considered to be appropriate for the monument. In this respect, the site of the monument was intended to be sort of secluded from the redesigned square. Upon completion of the restructuring, the Museumplein had become a vast green space, surrounded by a monumental cityscape. However, at regular intervals, the square is used as a festival space, exactly as originally intended but 'disturbing' the park like atmosphere around the monument.

²³⁹ www.4en5mei.nl, accessed October 14, 2013.

²⁴⁰ BATTJES: 'Het Museumplein'.

²⁴¹ BATTJES: 'Het Museumplein' 13.



View on the monument with the Sinti and Roma monument in the front and the Rijksmuseum in the back

3.1.4 Ravensbrück concentration camp

'Memory lane'

Nowadays, visiting the former concentration camp by train, means descending at Fürstenberg station and taking a 25 minutes walk to the former camp site.²⁴² As an introduction to a description of the concentration camp Ravensbrück, I will describe how the route from the railway station to the camp is marked by monuments which relate to different characterizations, and accents of the life in the camp and in the memory culture after liberation.

This route was also followed by many prisoners who arrived at Fürstenberg railway station. They were marched the three kilometers to the camp, most of the time carrying their luggage and exhausted from the endurances suffered during their railway journey.

The first encounter with the remembrance of the camp is a monument alongside the entrance road to the former camp site. It is a group of female figures and was created by the German sculptor Fritz Cremer (1906-1993). The sculpture was unveiled in 1965, and is entitled *Müttergruppe*. The monument portrays a group of three (bald) women carrying a stretcher on which a covered body is resting. A small child clasps itself to the woman in front. This monument symbolizes *caritas*, solidarity, and

²⁴² Which is now officially the Ravensbrück Gedenkstätte (memorial), Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten, see also: www.ravensbrueck.de, accessed October 14, 2013.

the fight against fascism. Caritas, the caring for each other, is symbolized through the women who carry together, in solidarity, the body of the other woman and who take care of the small child.²⁴³ The ‘fight’, the resistance is symbolized through the look on the faces and the strong position of the woman in front.



Müttergruppe (1965), Fritz Cremer

Further down the road, a Russian tank reminds us of the liberation of the camp by the allied Red Army on April 30, 1945. After the war, Fürstenberg and Ravensbrück became part of the German Democratic Republic, and were under the influence of the Soviet Union. Until the beginning of the 1990s, the Red Army used the camp's premises for army purposes.

Following the road, a wall made of cobblestones is erected in remembrance of the fact that during their detention, women had to carry out heavy duties like building streets. The entrance road to the campsite was constructed by female prisoners from Ravensbrück. A large street roller is shown in the memorial centre. This roller had to be pushed and pulled back and forth by the women in order to flatten the roads: a seemingly impossible job for women who had been underfed and lived under the worst of circumstances.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Not only women, but also many children, even babies and young children were detained in Ravensbrück, sometimes together with their mother, sometimes they had become separated from their family, in: STREBEL: *Das KZ Ravensbrück* 168.

²⁴⁴ MORRISON: *Ravensbrück* 195.



Cobblestone wall in remembrance of the slave labour work of the women

The sign on the wall states: *Zu Erinnerung an unsere Kameradinnen, die unter dem Joch des SS diese Strasse bauen mussten, und an alle die dabei ums Leben kamen.* Meaning, that this monument is in remembrance of the (female) friends who had to build this road under the yoke of the SS and also in remembrance of those who died during this labour.

Continuing the walk further down the road and upon entering the memorial site, an impressive monument can be seen. It is a monument by the German sculptor Will Lammert (1892-1957), entitled *Tragende* (She who carries). The monument was unveiled at the occasion of the official opening of the Mahn- und Gedänkstätte

Tragende (1959), Will Lammert



Ravensbrück in 1959. It symbolizes a standing woman who carries another woman. Both figures are placed on a pillar of seven meters. In memory culture of Ravensbrück, the monument became the symbol of Ravensbrück: helpfulness and solidarity between women.²⁴⁵

Thus these four monuments depict four important elements in the memory culture of the camp: solidarity and helpfulness (*caritas*), (slave) labour and liberation. These elements will return in the following description of the camp.

Ravensbrück during the Second World War

Construction of the Ravensbrück concentration camp started in January 1939 by 350 to 500 male prisoners from the nearby concentration camp Sachsenhausen.²⁴⁶ The location of the camp is in the neighbourhood of the Prussian village Ravensbrück, and a few kilometers from Fürstenberg, a health resort, beautifully situated on a lake called the Schwedtsee. This location was chosen because of the easy accessibility of the camp by train. Fürstenberg has a railway station and a direct connection by rail with Berlin. The camp's location was suitable for a concentration camp because it was a remote place, and more or less isolated from Fürstenberg, and the local population by the presence of the lake. The German SS authorities detained various prisoners including political prisoners, so called 'anti socials' (among these many Roma and Sinti), and 'criminals' meaning women who were sentenced and sent to Ravensbrück as detention.

The first prisoners were women from concentration camp Lichtenburg whom were transferred to Ravensbrück by the German SS authorities. Lichtenburg was one of the first German concentration camps, housed in the ruins of a renaissance castle in Prettin, eastern Germany. From 1933-1937, female prisoners were detained in Lichtenburg. In May 1939, 867 female prisoners were brought to Ravensbrück, and Lichtenburg concentration camp was consequently closed because it was considered to be unsuitable.²⁴⁷

In April 1941, a men's camp was established adjacent to the main camp and in June 1942, the Uckermark juvenile protective custody camp for adolescent girls and young women was opened. The camp was expanded until 1945. Additional barracks were constructed and in the autumn of 1944 also a large tent was put up.

Between 1939 and 1945, between 123,000 and 132,000 women and children, around 20,000 men and around 1,000 adolescent girls and young women were registered as Ravensbrück prisoners.²⁴⁸ The prisoners came from over 40 countries and the greatest numbers came from Poland, the Soviet Union, and Germany/Austria.²⁴⁹ Between 800 and 1,000 Dutch women were detained in Ravensbrück.²⁵⁰ The first Dutch women arrived in 1940. In September 1944 (after so called *Dolle Dinsdag* ('mad Tuesday'))

²⁴⁵ LANWERD: 'Skulpturales Gedenken'; HOFFMANN-CURTIS: 'Caritas und Kampf'.

²⁴⁶ STREBEL: *Das KZ Ravensbrück* 44-45.

²⁴⁷ STREBEL: *Das KZ Ravensbrück* 103.

²⁴⁸ HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering* 37.

²⁴⁹ HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering* 37.

²⁵⁰ STREBEL: *Das KZ Ravensbrück* 148; HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering* 37.

on September 5th 1944) Kamp Vught was closed because the Germans thought the Allied Forces would soon be in the south of the Netherlands. All 653 female prisoners were deported by train to Ravensbrück. During the war around 200 to 300 Dutch women lost their life in Ravensbrück. These women were mainly detained as political prisoners meaning that they had been active in resistance groups. Besides women, around 300 Dutch men were detained in Ravensbrück, around 36 of them lost their life.²⁵¹

Within the camp's walls, an industrial complex was built, and the female prisoners were forced to work in several production units and also in construction, like building roads, and working on the housing of the SS-personnel. From the summer of 1942, outside the camp's wall, Siemens & Halske constructed a production unit. During the war, more than 40 satellite camps were set up all over Germany, and Ravensbrück prisoners were forced into slave labour in all these production units.

In principle, Ravensbrück was not intended as an extermination centre. By the end of 1942, decisions were made to change Ravensbrück from a protective custody labour camp into more of a slave-labour economic enterprise.²⁵² Because of the bad living and working conditions, and also because of the overcrowding by the end of the war, the death toll was high.

The number of prisoners who died during detention has to be made upon estimations, also because at the end of the war German authorities destroyed all the camp death records.²⁵³ Tens of thousands of prisoners died because of hunger, diseases or were murdered, for instance in medical experiments.²⁵⁴

In the winter of 1944, a gas chamber was built next to the crematorium. Between January and April 1945, around 5,000 to 6,000 prisoners were gassed.

Liberation and commemoration of Ravensbrück

In mid-April 1945, the International, Danish and Swedish Red Cross rescued around 7,500 prisoners, and took them to Sweden, Switzerland, and France. The Swedish Count Bernadotte had been negotiating with the German authorities, and finally was given permission to have the Red Cross take these women away from Ravensbrück. Many prisoners, about 10,000, and most of the Dutch women were taken to Sweden.²⁵⁵

Upon an evacuation order of the authorities, around 20,000 remaining prisoners who were able to walk were marched to the north-west of Germany. Around 2,000 prisoners who were sick were left behind in Ravensbrück.

The Russian allied red Army 'officially' liberated Ravensbrück on April 30, 1945. After the war, the area around Ravensbrück and Fürstenberg became part of the German Democratic Republic and until 1993 the Russian army occupied the remnants of the concentration camp.

²⁵¹ STREBEL: *Das KZ Ravensbrück* 510.

²⁵² MORRISON: *Ravensbrück* 41.

²⁵³ MORRISON: *Ravensbrück* 299.

²⁵⁴ STREBEL: *Das KZ Ravensbrück* 505-510; HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering* 45.

²⁵⁵ STREBEL: *Das KZ Ravensbrück* 499; HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering* 44.

In 1948, the first commemoration took place in Ravensbrück. Outside the camps' premises, near the crematorium and along the wall of the camp where a mass grave was located, a memorial site was arranged. Later on, in 1959, this memorial site was officially 'opened' with the unveiling of the monument *Tragende*. After the Russian army had left, the Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück was expanded with the original camp site. In the former prison of the camp, called the bunker, each country set up an exhibition in separate cells.

Besides the yearly commemoration in the month of April, other activities are organized like seminars for second and third generation family members.²⁵⁶

Hogervorst concludes that the remembrance of Ravensbrück was shaped by communist influences in the early years after the war because of the political situation behind the Iron Curtain. This communist context dominated an initial feminist context which originated directly after the war during a short period of feminism. Women, many of them survivors of the war, worked together in their objective to create a peaceful world.²⁵⁷

3.1.5 After the war: the remembrance of Ravensbrück in the Netherlands

Reunions

After the war in many countries, survivors of the concentration camps established committees with the objective to create a possibility to share experiences between former prisoners. Not all of the former prisoners were enthusiastic to participate in these groups: some of them wanted to forget this period and distanced themselves from these organizations. Others had to make a choice in which particular committee they wanted to participate because they had been in different camps.

In the Netherlands, regarding Ravensbrück, already in December 1945 former prisoners met each other during a reunion in The Hague. This reunion did not have any political background or political goal. The objective was to meet each other again, to bring up old memories, and to see whether women were in need of anything. The meeting had an informal character. A communist oriented group of women criticized the light hearted atmosphere during this meeting.²⁵⁸ They thought women should be active in the ongoing battle against fascism, and fight for equal rights for women and better social circumstances for all.

Nationale Feestrok

Apart from meeting each other during reunions, others looked for a more 'creative' output for their need to remember. One of the well-known Dutch Ravensbrück women was Mies Boissevain. She took the initiative to create the so called Nationale Feestrok, the National Celebration Skirt. The objective was that all Dutch women would make a skirt, and utilize for that skirt pieces of fabric from other gar-

²⁵⁶ www.ravensbrueck.de, accessed June 12, 2012.

²⁵⁷ HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering* 267.

²⁵⁸ WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 107-108.

ments. In particular garments with an emotional burden should be used, like for instance the costume of a husband who had been shot during the war. Women would wear these skirts at special occasions. The skirt became very popular for a couple of years and was considered as an effective method in coming to terms with experiences from the past, by means of creating a garment for the future.²⁵⁹ Possibly one of the last public manifestations of the Nationale Feestrok took place in 1948 around the 25th jubilee of the reign of Queen Wilhelmina.

Two committees

At the end of the war, the Dutch women who had been brought to Sweden stayed there together for several months. During their detention in Ravensbrück, solidarity had been present between women from all religions and between communist and non-communist groups. Many women managed to survive because of this solidarity. During their time in Sweden, solidarity resulted in discussions about the future, and in particular about the future position of women in after war Dutch society. They thought women could have an important role in protecting the world against new forms of fascism. In this respect initiatives were developed to establish a new Dutch organization of women.²⁶⁰ This organization, the Nederlandse Vrouwen Beweging (Dutch female movement, in short: NVB), was in fact established in November 1946, and may be described as an organization for women and for peace. A couple of years later, the NVB was said to have become a communist organization. In 1950 all bonds and connection between the NVB and Ravensbrück had been lost.

As of the 1950s, there were two organizations of former Ravensbrück prisoners. One of them was under the direct influence of the Dutch communist party; the members of the board all belonged to the communist party. This committee was called: Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück (Committee Women of Ravensbrück). The other committee was constituted by a former communist party member and was called Nederlands Ravensbrück Comité (NRC, Dutch Committee Ravensbrück). Both committees were political active but were also in a fierce competition with each other about which committee could use the ‘memory’ of Ravensbrück for its own objectives. Bystanders considered both committees to have a communist signature, one committee (CVR, the Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück) maybe more than the other.²⁶¹

Monument to honour Tante Riek

In the first decade after the war, the only monument in the Netherlands which had a direct ‘connection’ with Ravensbrück was a monument in the eastern part of the country in the home town of a former honourable member of the Dutch resistance, Helena Th. Kuipers-Rietberg (1893-1944), also called Tante Riek (Aunt Riek). This ‘mother of the resistance’ had been extremely courageous during the war in arranging hiding places for many persons who were on the run from the Germans. Because

²⁵⁹ WITHUIS: ‘De doorbraak en de feestrok’.

²⁶⁰ WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 75.

²⁶¹ WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 163.

of her efforts, the lives of many were saved. Unfortunately, she herself was caught by the Germans and sent to Ravensbrück where she fell ill and died on December 27, 1944.²⁶²

In Winterswijk, on May 4, 1955, a monument to honour Tante Riek was unveiled by Queen Wilhelmina. The monument was designed by the Dutch sculptor Gerrit Bolhuis (1907-1975).

With the monument not only this woman, but all women who had been in the resistance were commemorated. The monument depicts a woman with a little stag at her feet: 'They came to her like chased game' reads the text on the monument. At the unveiling ceremony, one of the speakers was a former prisoner of Ravensbrück who was also a member of the Dutch communist party (Communistische Partij Nederland). A group of former prisoners of Ravensbrück who belonged to the Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück was also present, and presented themselves behind their standard. A year later, this committee requested the local authorities for permission to organize a Ravensbrück commemoration. This request was denied. According to Withuis, the reason for this refusal was the apparent communist signature of the speech, and the presentation of the committee during the unveiling ceremony.²⁶³



Monument Tante Riek by Gerrit Bolhuis (Winterswijk, 1955)

²⁶² www.oudwinterswijk.nl, accessed July 28, 2012.

²⁶³ WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 159.

3.2 Construction of the monument and ritual commemoration practices

3.2.1 Initiative for the monument and development²⁶⁴

Between 1955 and 1972, a small group of former prisoners of Ravensbrück attended the yearly commemoration of concentration camp Buchenwald at the Amsterdam cemetery Nieuwe Oosterbegraafplaats and considered this the commemoration of their own camp.

In October 1955, an urn with ashes from the concentration camp Buchenwald was buried by communist former prisoners on the Nieuwe Oosterbegraafplaats in Amsterdam. Every year a commemoration ceremony was held and former prisoners from Ravensbrück, including the board of the Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, attended this ceremony. However, Withuis states that this could not be called an official ‘commemoration’ of Ravensbrück because only a few women attended, and most of the Ravensbrück women were not aware of the fact that there was a commemoration.²⁶⁵

As will be explained here after, the Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, and not the other committee Nederlands Comité Ravensbrück, took the lead in the initiative to erect a monument. I will continue to discuss this initiative of the Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück. When I refer to this Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, I will use the word Committee.

Members of the Committee, Dutch former prisoners of Ravensbrück, were for the first time officially informed about the initiative to erect a monument through a circular dated December 19, 1972.²⁶⁶ In this circular mention is made of the impressive commemoration of the Februaristaking 1941. Much more people and organizations attended this commemoration that year than in the years before. The reason may be the protests and cooperation between many organizations of war survivors against the plans of the Dutch government to release three German war criminals who were detained in Breda, the Drie van Breda. The successful protest led to a withdrawal of the intention to release them. In the circular mention is made of the important role the Committee claimed to have in this concerted action. The Committee was very happy to announce their initiative for a monument which would be in honour of ‘all women who had the courage to say “no” against fascism.’²⁶⁷

On February 17, 1973, the Committee asked the local authorities to provide funds to finance a monument.²⁶⁸ In this letter the Committee explained their motives. In the first place, the Committee held the opinion that they, as survivors of women’s concentration camp Ravensbrück where 93,000 women died, were entitled to such a monument. Their service record with regard to the battle for liberation of the country would give them the right to make a claim for a monument.

In the second place, the Committee stated that the important role of women during the war, not only in activities in the resistance but also in the support of their husbands, had been undervalued. According

²⁶⁴ See also HOGERVORST: *Onwrikbare herinnering* 140-147.

²⁶⁵ WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 273.

²⁶⁶ Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück: Circular December 19, 1972.

²⁶⁷ Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück: Circular December 19, 1972.

²⁶⁸ Letter to the City Council of Amsterdam, February 17, 1973.

to the Committee, there was at that moment no other monument in the Netherlands to honour these women.

The Committee explained in their letter that female former prisoners were aging and that the group of former prisoners was quickly getting smaller. As long as they would be able, they would like to leave behind a monument, but also a message for present and future generations. The monument should be located in Amsterdam, city of the resistance, and at a 'remarkable' place and thus be integrated into city life.²⁶⁹

According to Withuis, the positive response may be seen as an illustration of the turn in opinion. It seemed as if something had to be made good for the way communists and women of the resistance had been treated so far.²⁷⁰ On November 21, 1972, the local city council decided to finance all costs of the monument: 300,000 guilders for construction. Later on, 235,000 guilders had to be paid because of technical problems with sound and light of the monument.²⁷¹

Both, city council and the Committee, thought that the monument would be the first monument to honour the resistance activities of women during the war. However, already back in 1950 in Arnhem, a monument in remembrance of women and their tasks during the war, be it at home or in the resistance, had been erected. This monument was created by the female artiste Nel Klaassen.²⁷² A second female monument was erected in 1955 in Winterswijk and is the above mentioned monument in honour of Tante Riek.

The Amsterdam city council formulated the following arguments to validate their affirmative decision. They would like to refer to Amsterdam as the 'city of resistance'. Also the monument would put an end to the undervaluation of the activities of women during the war. There and above the monument would be more than just a commemoration, it would reflect the actuality of 'saying no' for instance against the, at the time, current political battle in Chile and in Greece.²⁷³

Main focus of the monument would be on the remembrance of Ravensbrück, a woman's concentration camp. No attention was paid at that time to the remembrance of the male and juvenile prisoners.

According to Joost van Santen, one of the artists, there were two main objectives with regard to the monument.²⁷⁴ In the first place, the monument would offer a place of remembrance for former female prisoners, a place to commemorate their friends whom they lost and had to leave behind in Ravensbrück. In his opinion the remembrance of the female prisoners comes in the first place. It was the

²⁶⁹ Letter to the City Council of Amsterdam, February 17, 1973.

²⁷⁰ WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 278.

²⁷¹ The motives for their decision are described in: RIJKSMUSEUM VINCENT VAN GOGH (persbericht): *1 monument en 3 ontwerpers, het Ravensbrück monument* and discussed by WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 279. See also Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, Circular December 4, 1973.

²⁷² 'De vrouw in oorlogstijd' (woman in wartime), artist: Nel Klaassen (1906-1989), a monument to honour women in wartime. A poem on the socket of the monument 'De vrouwen in de oorlog' by Reinold Kuipers refers to the dedication of the monument. The monument was unveiled in 1949, www.4en5mei.nl, accessed July 28, 2012.

²⁷³ RIJKSMUSEUM VINCENT VAN GOGH (persbericht): *1 monument en 3 ontwerpers, het Ravensbrück monument*; WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 279; Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, Circular December 4, 1973.

²⁷⁴ Only one of the artists, Joost van Santen, could be reached for an interview and comment on construction and development of the monument. The interview took place on July 2, 2010. The results are presented and discussed in the text.

initiative of the Committee to create a monument. Remembrance of the men has come up many years later, around the year 2000, and is secondary to the original objective of the monument. In the second place, the monuments holds a message, a warning against fascism.

3.2.2 Artists and design

In 1972 the Committee asked the board of the professional organization for performing artists in the Netherlands, the Bond voor Beeldende Kunstenaars, if they would send out a message to their members if anyone would be interested in designing their monument.²⁷⁵ Three (male) artists, Joost van Santen, Frank Nix, and Guido Eckhardt, responded positively to this request and were asked to cooperate in the design and construction of the monument.

Joost van Santen was born in Amsterdam in 1929. During the war, he was forced to go into hiding because his family was of Jewish origin. In a press article he explained that he felt more or less guilty because until 1975 he had never done 'something in return'. Designing this monument was his way of 'making up' in this respect.²⁷⁶ At the exhibition in the Van Gogh Museum, accompanying the unveiling of the monument, Van Santen presented work with an accent on light effects. This became a central focus in his later work. As he declares on his website, his main focus is to work on: 'Light and daylight in architecture and sculpture.' 'Dynamic daylight images' are at the heart of his work. Back in 1970, he created his first coloured glass windows in a church in the Dutch city of Hoogvliet. At the moment when the sun appears, colours are projected into the church building. These so called 'Images of light' moving through space fascinated Van Santen. Since that time, light determines his work. In his projects with daylight art in architecture he searches for places where the inflowing light can be intercepted and transformed. One of his statements is: 'Becoming aware of light as part of the universe.'²⁷⁷

Frank Nix was born in Djakarta, Indonesia, in 1934. He died in October 2008. He was a painter, ceramist, engraver, and sculptor. He was raised in the Dutch East Indies. During the Second World War, he was interned in a Japanese concentration camp. His close affiliation with life in these camps was one of the reasons why he was commissioned with the design for the monument 'Japanse Vrouwenkampen' (monument Japanese female concentration camps) in Arnhem. This monument was erected in 1971 and unveiled by Queen Juliana.

Guido Eckhardt was born in 1944 in Roosendaal. He is both a sculptor and painter. At the exhibition at the unveiling of the monument he presented a series of engravings representing Genesis, the creation narrative. This series was bought by his home town city council, the city of Roosendaal.

The three did not know each other beforehand. On October 28, 1972, they were officially committed by the Committee to make a design based on ideas for a sculpture in remembrance of the Dutch vic-

²⁷⁵ At the time, the labour union of artists.

²⁷⁶ *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, May 3, 1975: 'Twee exposities begeleiden onthulling Ravensbrückmonument'.

²⁷⁷ www.home.wxs.nl/~jvansant/, accessed April 3, 2012.

tims of concentration camp Ravensbrück as formulated by the Committee.²⁷⁸ This design was praised for its functional use of light, sound, and text. The monument would be more than just a remembrance of the victims; it would be a warning to the general public from victims and survivors to say ‘no’ and to persevere to the extreme, if circumstances would require such. The design of the monument reflects in a special way the actuality and necessity of resistance. The monument would also be a testimony of gratefulness towards the women who resisted an inhuman regime.

In April 1973, no Buchenwald commemoration was organized and for that reason the Committee announced its own commemoration combined with a reunion. The event would take place at a location in town. A model of the monument would be shown and one of the artists would attend to explain the design. According to the Committee there would be no doubt that the members would appreciate the design as much as they did.²⁷⁹ And they did: ‘All present admired the way in which the artists gave expression to our thoughts.’²⁸⁰

Joost van Santen may be considered as ‘leading’ artist in design and development of the monument. At the time of this research project (2010-2014), he was the only person still available who had witnessed and contributed in person to the development and construction of the monument. As stated before, Frank Nix, Guido Eckhardt, and Van Santen worked together in materializing one design.

In 2008, Frank Nix died and Guido Eckhardt was not available for an interview.

According to Van Santen, his ideas and concepts (the plates, the beacon, the sound, and the light) were leading in the final design of the monument. From the start up and till the year 2000, he had been involved in matters concerning the monument. He acted for a long time as an intermediary with regard to technical matters and matters of maintenance of the monument. After the unveiling ceremony of the monument, he lost contact with the other artists. At the time of the interview, July 2, 2010, he was not aware of the fact that Frank Nix had died. The artists did not know each other before this project and did not keep in touch afterwards. They were, according to Van Santen, entirely different artists and created different work. He had been the only one who kept in touch with the Committee and was concerned with the monument.

According to Van Santen, after a first consultation with the Committee, it was immediately clear for him that the design of the monument had to be based on ‘sound dying in light’. He explains the design and symbolism of the monument as follows.

The form of the monument results from the sound and light. Both sound and light are reflected by the plates. The Committee wanted a monument but also a public statement for present and future generations. The idea of the message is symbolized with the slowly into light transforming beat, linked with a disturbing, rumbling noise. The light symbolizes the message which is sent by the victims of the war against fascism, even after their death. It is a message which calls for action against fascism and racism, no matter where or when. The cylinder sends the signal. The length of the sound signal was

²⁷⁸ Letter to the artists, October 28, 1972.

²⁷⁹ Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, Circular March 27, 1973.

²⁸⁰ Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, Circular December 4, 1973.

planned at two minutes, during which the light will slowly come, and fade away. Beat and light are positioned in the cylinder which is a symbol for a beacon. Through history, beacons have indicated the right direction and warned against threatening situations, according to Van Santen.

The monument would be located at a public space and a continuing sound could be considered annoying. For that reason, the sound should only be heard upon approaching the monument. The beat has been made 'visible' in light beams that will be visible all over the square.

At that time, in the 1970s, the combination of sound and light appeared to be very complicated with respect to technical matters. According to Van Santen, at the unveiling of the monument, sound and light worked well. A month later, the system for the light broke down and sometime later the system for the sound also broke down. Many technical people were involved in the repair work on the monument but this appeared to be a major, complicated technical problem to fix, and often the system broke down again. Each time this happened, it was a complicated matter. At some point, the city council provided 235,000 guilders for a big maintenance operation but this did not mean the end of the problems, according to Van Santen. Also, when there had been a fair or other public manifestations or festivities on the square, the electricity for the monument would have been used by people involved in the manifestation. Many times it would be forgotten to put the electricity for the monument back on. Every time this happened, Van Santen would call the municipal county and it would be switched on again.

For more than 20 years, Van Santen was deeply involved to get (and to keep) the sound and light in accordance with his design. But around the year 2000, he decided finally to let it go. He came to this decision after attending the yearly commemoration at the monument in April 2000. Both sound and light were not working but nobody noticed! Van Santen was the only one who considered these elements of the monument important. Van Santen says:

'It was not important for the women who were attending the ceremony. They had a beautiful spot to lay down flowers, and that was more important to them; they do not need the sound and light. When I'm dead, nobody will bother about the sound and light anyhow.'

After 2000, he distanced himself from the monument.

In 1946 the Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück formulated its statutes. One of the first objectives of the Committee would be to be 'vigilant and combat against old or new forms of fascism and also act against all forms of racism.'²⁸¹

Communists considered 'fascism' to be one of the excesses of 'capitalism'. For that reason, one always had to be cautious. The Committee's choice of the text on the monument was done on purpose

²⁸¹ *Statuten van het Comité 'Vrouwen van Ravensbrück'*, January 1946.

and must be explained in this sense.²⁸² The term ‘fascism’ was in the 1970s well-known and accepted in left-wing and communist groups and was chosen for that reason.

Originally, Van Santen had thought of ‘to those’ instead of ‘to her who persevered to the utmost in saying no to fascism.’ In this respect, the message of the monument would have been more universal, but the Committee decided on ‘to her’. At that time, there was some debate about the grammatical correctness of the wording. Because of the decision of the Committee, the text refers to the women who were active in the resistance against the German oppressors during the war.

3.2.3 Symbolism

Van Santen’s original thoughts on representing the battle against fascism, and the remembrance of the fallen former prisoners, were on drawing a line on the plates, starting with a marker ‘Amsterdam’ and then at the end of the line ‘Berlin’ and finally ‘Ravensbrück’. The other two artists did not like this idea and this idea did not ‘make’ it to the final design. Now the symbolism is in the sound and the light, but Van Santen thinks that the message of the monument would be better passed on if some kind of explanation about Ravensbrück and fascism would be given in the proximity of the monument. Except from the text on the monument and on the plaque on the backside of the monument, there was, at the time, no further explication of the monument.

In 2013, as described above, the memorial plaque at the back was removed and a new plaque was installed at the front site of the monument. It is now possible to get information on the monument and on Ravensbrück by means of an application on a mobile phone.²⁸³

The sound stirs up associations and that is exactly what Van Santen’s intention was. The more associations people make, the better it is. It does not matter if these associations differ from his own intentions. He knows that some people associate the noise with the noise of the crematoria ovens in the concentration camps or with the noise of airplanes passing by. Both are threatening associations. Van Santen says that as an artist, his own thoughts and intentions with the monument are most important and when defining the design, it is impossible to know beforehand what kind of associations people will have. He never thinks of the spectator when designing, he never designs a work for somebody, the design is only important to himself. But with regard to the Ravensbrück monument, he would like to have some more reference to Ravensbrück itself and for that reason he regrets the fact that his line, referring to Ravensbrück, was not accepted in the final design.

3.2.4 Place

The Committee expressed a firm opinion about the place of the monument.²⁸⁴ In contrast with other monuments in remembrance of German concentration camps, they did not want it to be placed on a

²⁸² WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 162-165.

²⁸³ www.4en5mei.nl, accessed October 14, 2013.

cemetery. At that time (1973) monuments like the Buchenwald and Auschwitz monuments were still located at the Nieuwe Ooster cemetery in Amsterdam. The Committee wanted the monument to be in the centre of the city of Amsterdam, Amsterdam being the so called ‘city of resistance’. In this way the message, conveyed through the monument, would be assimilated with life in Amsterdam. Taking this position, the Committee accepted the fact that the monument would be used for other purposes, like relaxing in the sun or children playing games. In cooperation with the city council of Amsterdam, the Museumplein was chosen as site for the monument.

When the three artists started working on the monument, they had walked through Amsterdam to look for the right place to erect the monument. Although they were aware of the fact that other war monuments were located on graveyards, they considered a graveyard not a suitable place because the Committee had told them they wanted to make a public statement with the monument. But they also warned that the monument might be used with different objectives than commemoration.

The place of choice for the monument was a secluded spot under the trees, close to the Van Gogh Museum with very little noise from the traffic, which was important according to the Committee. A very important aspect of the monument would be the sound and light and for that reason it would be essential to put the monument at a quiet place.²⁸⁵ According to Van Santen, a beautiful spot, although in his opinion much too secluded: the monument could not easily be noticed by the public and hence the monument remained ‘unknown’ for many years. But it was a very suitable place for commemoration. In 1996, with the redevelopment of the square and the expansion of the Van Gogh Museum, the monument was moved to the other side of the Museumplein. On November 3, 1996, the rededication of the monument was performed by the mayor of the city, Schelto Patijn. The chairman of the Committee, Stennie Pratomo-Gret, expressed her consent with the new location. She also praised the monument for its uniqueness in Europe in her speech:

‘It acts as a beacon, a sign of warning through the light beams and the sound of the heartbeats. It is a sign of honour to all women who resisted the remorseless occupation regime of the Nazi-killers who sent our beloved fellow Jewish countrymen, and our women of the resistance and their children to their deaths in the concentration camps.’²⁸⁶

3.2.5 Unveiling ceremony and opening expositions

Originally the unveiling was planned on October 11, 1974. In a letter dated August 22, 1974, the artists informed the Committee that problems had come up with construction of the plates. As a result, installation of the monument had been delayed and the unveiling ceremony had to be postponed.²⁸⁷ On

²⁸⁴ Letter of the Committee to the city council of Amsterdam, February 17, 1973 and letter of the Committee to H. Lammers, alderman of art affairs of the city of Amsterdam, September 28, 1973.

²⁸⁵ Letter of the Committee to H. Lammers, alderman of art affairs of the city of Amsterdam, September 28, 1973.

²⁸⁶ Speech, Stennie-Pratomo Gret, November 3, 1996.

²⁸⁷ Letter of the three artists and their technical advisor to the Committee, dated August 22, 1973.

December 20, 1974, the Committee announced the new date for the unveiling ceremony. This ceremony would take place in 1975, on April 25. In retrospect, the Committee considered this a more appropriate date for two reasons. In the first place, in 1975 it would be 30 years ago that Ravensbrück was liberated. In the second place, 1975 was called by the United Nations the 'International Year of the Woman'.²⁸⁸

The unveiling ceremony took place on April 25, 1975, exactly 30 years after the Swedish Red Cross started with the evacuation of Ravensbrück prisoners. Former prisoners belonging to both Committees (CVR and NRC) were attending the ceremony so that the impression was given to the outside world that they had altogether made an effort to initiate a monument.

Seven former prisoners unveiled the monument. The mayor of Amsterdam, Samkalden, and representatives of the embassies of Belgium, Luxembourg, Russia, and West- and East-Germany were attending the ceremony. An van Kampen in her position as chair of the Committee 'transferred' the monument officially to the city of Amsterdam.

Apart from the monument and in cooperation with Amnesty International, the Committee organized other activities like lectures and presentations. The objective was to protest against all forms of injustice in the world.²⁸⁹ Apart from these activities, a book was published with interviews with women who had been active in the resistance. A first copy of this book was presented at the occasion of the unveiling of the monument to a young Amsterdam girl, symbolic for the message the Committee wanted to send to future generations.²⁹⁰

At the same time, in the immediate vicinity of the monument, at the Van Gogh Museum, an exhibition called *De vrouw in het Verzet* (The woman in the resistance) was opened. This exhibition was put together by Han de Vries and Efraim Milikowski and offered an overview of the activities of Dutch women in the resistance against the German occupation. Attention was also paid to the persecution of the Jewish people, the big strike held in Amsterdam in February 1941 (the so called Februaristaking), in protest against the German occupation, the measures taken against the Jewish people and the German system of concentration camps. At the same time, an exhibition was opened called: *1 monument en 3 ontwerpers* (1 monument and 3 designers).²⁹¹ The last exhibition gave an overview of the work of the three artists who designed jointly the monument.²⁹² Scale models of the monument and technical explications were presented. In a press release, the artists explained design, symbolism, and background of the monument.²⁹³ The idea was to link the monument outside with the exhibitions inside the museum and in that way support and clarify the abstract configuration of the monument.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁸ Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, Circular December 20, 1974.

²⁸⁹ *De Rotterdammer* (April 26, 1975): 'Monument voor kamp Ravensbrück in Amsterdam onthuld'.

²⁹⁰ WALDA: *Terug in de tijd*.

²⁹¹ Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh: *1 monument en 3 ontwerpers, het Ravensbrück monument*.

²⁹² At that time, in 1975, the monument was located near the Van Gogh Museum at the west side of the Museumplein. In 1996, after redesign of the Museumplein, the monument was transferred to the eastern side.

²⁹³ Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh: *1 monument en 3 ontwerpers, het Ravensbrück monument*.

²⁹⁴ Report on a preparatory meeting for the exhibition accompanying the monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, undated.

In general, the monument was well received in the press; in particular the smooth design and the symbol of the beacon were appreciated.²⁹⁵ But not all former prisoners were positive: according to data collected by Withuis, there was discussion about the design and in particular the cylinder which looked like the chimney of a crematorium. Others considered the monument to be mainly for the glory of the Committee herself, and not for the women who had to be remembered.²⁹⁶

With regard to the function and meaning of the monument to the Committee and to the former prisoners, Van Santen says that for them most important was just to have a place to go to, and to organize commemorations; design and location are coming at second place.

With regard to the second objective of the monument, the message to the general public, he thinks that more explanation about Ravensbrück but also about fascism should be given. In this respect he proposes to make a video connection between the Verzetsmuseum Amsterdam (Amsterdam Resistance Museum) and the monument at the Museumplein.²⁹⁷ This museum is also located in Amsterdam and ‘tells the story of the Dutch people during the war’. Issues of how people did respond to the German occupation, who resisted, why and how are presented. Within the museum, an explanation could be given about the Ravensbrück concentration camp, the resistance of females during the war and their fight against fascism.

3.2.6 Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück: a postponed monument

At the time of the unveiling of the monument, the question was raised in several newspapers why it had taken 30 years before a monument was erected. An van Kampen, chairman of the board of the Committee, stated in response that for years the victims had been remembered at other, already existing monuments. In recent years, the need for an own monument had come up because many women renewed their contact with the Committee.²⁹⁸ Up to that time, former prisoners had been divided between the two committees. Many former prisoners were not all involved in commemorating activities because they wanted to go on with their lives and leave their war time experiences behind them.

Regarding this postponement of the monument, three factors are relevant.

The first factor is a characterization of the time after the war as one of ‘silence and repression’ of war experiences.²⁹⁹ Ravensbrück, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz belonged to the regime of the Soviet Union and were behind the ‘Iron Curtain’. The East-West conflict, the ‘Cold War’, had an enormous impact on the memory culture of the Second World War in the Netherlands. According to Withuis, the influence of the Cold War on how we have been handling this part of history has for a long time been neglected. After the invasion of Hungary by the Soviet-Union in 1956, the communist party and its members became isolated in Dutch society. Many members of the resistance who were detained in

²⁹⁵ *Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad, NRC Handelsblad, De Waarheid.*

²⁹⁶ WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 280-281.

²⁹⁷ www.verzetsmuseum.org, accessed April 10, 2012

²⁹⁸ *Trouw* (April 26, 1975): ‘Monument voor kamp Ravensbrück in Amsterdam onthuld’.

²⁹⁹ WITHUIS: *Na het Kamp* 17, 415.

those camps belonged to the Dutch communist party. Nowadays, there are many commemorations of the war and they are a well-known and respected part of the present memory culture of the war, but this has not always been like that: many camps have not been remembered for a long time.³⁰⁰ For years, camp committees have been under suspicion because of a possible communist signature. The relationship between the camp committees and government authorities suffered because of the boycott of communist organizations. In 1973, the Dutch government formally recognized the German Democratic Republic. In consequence, the isolation and boycott of everything that possibly could be 'communist' diminished.

A second factor may be the increase in attention for war time experiences of survivors after the turbulence around the release of the Drie van Breda, three German war criminals, in 1972. Above, mention is already made of the impressive commemoration in 1972 of the Februaristaking 1941. Much more people and organizations attended this commemoration that year than in the years before. The reason may be the protests and cooperation between many organizations of war survivors against the plans of the Dutch government to release these three German war criminals who were detained in Breda. The whole country was in turmoil because of the plans to release Fischer, Aus der Fünter, and Kotalla. They had been graced from death penalty and were serving a life sentence in a Dutch prison. Around that time, Dutch society was changing: the political climate became more left wing, the emancipation of women became prominent, and the interest in the Second World War and the long term consequences for the victims increased after a long period of neglect and repression.

Societal interest in the fate of the victims of the war, not only former prisoners who had survived but also survivors of the Holocaust, increased. In 1969, the documentary *Begrijpt u nu waarom ik huil?* (Now do you understand why I am crying?), made by Louis van Gasteren, was presented. Through this impressive and emotional film, the Dutch population in general was for the first time confronted by a public medium with the consequences of war trauma.

The successful protest not only led to a withdrawal of the intention to release the Drie van Breda, but also, in general, resulted in more interest in memory culture of the war. The Committee became aware of the increased interest in the remembrance of Ravensbrück and reacted with the initiative to a monument.

A third factor is a combination of the two issues discussed above. Because of the societal acceptance of the communist oriented camp committees, and the increased interest in camp history and remembrance, funding for monuments was within reach. The Committee benefitted from this change in policy and was enabled by the city council of Amsterdam to accomplish their wish to erect a monu-

³⁰⁰ For instance, the monument to remember female victims of Japanese concentration camps in the Dutch Indies was raised in 1971, the monument to remember concentration camp Auschwitz, the so called Spiegelmonument was raised in 1977 and the national monument to remember concentration camp Dachau was raised in 1996. See for an extensive discussion on the dynamism in Dutch war monument culture, VAN GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte*.

ment in remembrance of the female victims of Ravensbrück and as a warning against new forms of fascism.

3.3 The yearly commemoration at the Museumplein: experiences of former Dutch prisoners

In his seminal work *The texture of memory*, Young states: ‘Memorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac.’³⁰¹ They are dependent on visitors for whatever memory they produce. As a consequence, an interaction may take place between a monument and the public. There may be different types of spectators, ranging from ‘not involved and not knowing’ to ‘involved and knowing’. This means that some spectators will have an emotional attachment to what the monument stands for. Others may also know the reference of the monument. Some spectators will not have such an attachment and as a result it may happen that the monument will be used for other purposes than remembrance, as is shown on the picture below.



The monument as a place to relax
[picture Michiel Faro]

3.3.1 Introduction of former prisoners

To determine the interactive ‘qualities’ of the Ravensbrück monument, I was interested in the opinion of people who are ‘involved’ and ‘know’ what the monument stands for. With this objective in mind, I

³⁰¹ YOUNG: *The texture of memory* preface xii, see also Chapter 2 of this thesis.

interviewed former prisoners of Ravensbrück about the monument and its location, and about the yearly commemoration. A search for candidates for these semi structured interviews was done through a letter from the Committee to all known former prisoners.³⁰² As a result it was possible to conduct interviews with nine females and one male former prisoners from Ravensbrück. It appeared that not all women attending the yearly commemoration ceremony had been imprisoned in the main camp of Ravensbrück; some of them had met each other at so called 'sub camps' (*Aussenkommandos*) of Ravensbrück, where they had been deported to from Ravensbrück but also from, for instance, Auschwitz. To remember their shared endurances, they attend the yearly commemoration of Ravensbrück although formally they were not, or only for a short period, confined in the main camp of Ravensbrück. One of the participants never attended the yearly commemoration for reasons to be explained below.

At the time of the interviews, March to December 2010, the eldest participant was 96 years old, and the youngest participant was 69 years old. Unfortunately, shortly after the interview Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid died. Stien Spier-Pullen died in 2011.

All interviews were taped and documented by the author.

Together with the interviews, yearly commemorations at the Museumplein, but also at the Nationaal Monument Kamp Vught were attended.³⁰³

All first generation participants gave permission to use their name in the report on the interviews. Another argument to use their full name is based on their public 'status': most of these first generation participants are frequently asked to tell their story because of their wartime experiences, it would be confusing not to use full names of the participants.

The following former prisoners participated in an interview:

Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: March and April 2010

Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: June 2010

Bram Grisnigt: June 2010

Marianne Burgers-van Dam: August 2010

Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid: October 2010

Selma van de Perre-Velleman: April 2010

Hebe Kohlbrugge: September 2010

Stien Spier-Pullen: July 2010

Beppy Ottenbros-Bosboom: October 2010

Lotty Huffener-Veffe: October 2010

³⁰² The Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück is at present organized as a foundation and formally called *Stichting Comité Vrouwen-concentratiekamp Ravensbrück*, www.ravensbruck.nl, accessed August 28, 2012.

³⁰³ Most of the female participants were interned at concentration Kamp Vught before they were deported to Ravensbrück. Many of them also attend the commemoration at Kamp Vught National Memorial, some of them also attend the ceremony at Kamp Westerbork.

3.3.2 Description of the yearly commemoration: 2012

The yearly commemoration takes place on a Sunday in April, close to the date of liberation of the camp. With regard to planning this date, the Committee always has to take in account the festivities of what used to be Koninginnedag (Queen's Day), and is nowadays Koningsdag (King's Day) with the succession of Queen Beatrix by her son King Willem-Alexander, and in particular the construction of the *kermis* (fair). Most of the years, the commemoration takes place around April 24.

The commemoration is organized as follows. Around 11 o'clock, all invited people assemble in an office building nearby the monument for a welcoming get-together and coffee. A couple of minutes before 12 o'clock, a procession to the monument starts. Former prisoners are invited to open the procession and walk behind the Committee's official banner.



Procession to the commemoration ceremony 2013

At 12 o'clock, the commemoration ceremony is opened by the chair of the Committee. Every year a different speaker is invited to give an address. In 2012 for example, the director of Kamp Westerbork, Dirk Mulder, gave a speech. In other years, representatives of local authorities, like the mayor of Amsterdam, or national government authorities, like a minister or a secretary of state, were invited. Usually, the focus of the addresses is on the role of women during the war, in particular on their role in the resistance. Also, former prisoners were invited to give a speech. In 2012, after the official speech

by Dirk Mulder, the Dutch singer Maarten Peters performed his song *Sylvia Elizabeth*. This song is about a Dutch woman who gave birth in Ravensbrück to a little girl. She was named Sylvia Elizabeth. Unfortunately, the girl died after a couple of weeks. Music is not a standard element in the commemoration, in some years there may also be two speeches instead of music, however, in 2013, Maarten Peters sang *Sylvia Elizabeth* again.

Next standard element is performed by the children of a local elementary school, Nicolaes Maes. This school had ‘adopted’ the monument. Two or more children recite poems, and all children, including their teachers, lay flowers.

What we might call the ‘pinnacle’ of the ceremony is the honouring of the female victims of Ravensbrück by their former camp friends. Former prisoners are invited by the chairman of the Committee to lay flowers in remembrance of their friends who lost their lives in Ravensbrück. Together they come up on the platform and lay the flowers near the text on the monument. In 2013, this had become only a small group. Following the laying of flowers, the chairman asks for a minute of silence in respect of the victims of Ravensbrück.

Last part of the official commemoration is the laying of flowers by other organizations and by individuals. After the closing words of the chairman, most of the former prisoners and their family return to the office building for a social and informal lunch. This lunch is not only attended by former prisoners and their families, but also by family members of former prisoners who already passed away.



Wreath laying ritual, 2013 commemoration ceremony

3.3.3 Participants: the importance of the yearly commemoration

Reasons to participate

One of the issues discussed during the interviews is the reason why former prisoners attend the yearly ceremony. Why is it important to commemorate together, instead of alone, maybe at home? Different reasons are given.

Marianne Burgers-van Dam speaks of an ‘obligation’ to her sister. As young girls, her sister was 17 and she herself was 18, they were active in the resistance. They were caught and sent to Ravensbrück. Her sister got sick and died in Ravensbrück. The remembrance of her sister is after all those years still a very emotional and personal issue and difficult to talk about. She feels that she has to go and allow herself to mourn and remember her sister once a year at the commemoration. Her attitude and mental

position of secluding herself from what has happened in Ravensbrück has saved her. It saved her at the time when she was in the camp, afterwards, and nowadays:

‘Even when I tell about it, it is still very hard to believe that I witnessed it all, when I am attending the commemoration I am thinking of her, it does not go past me but in a way I sort of lock myself from what has happened. I am present but also absent, in a way I want to be absent because I can’t handle it to be present. I try and make an effort to go to Amsterdam each year. I think I am obliged to my little sister and I also go for her.’³⁰⁴

Deborah Maarsen-Laufer feels that attending is an obligation to her mother. She was in Ravensbrück together with her mother and two sisters. From the moment she herself became mother, she started to attend commemorations. Ever since the monument at the Museumplein has been erected, in 1975, she attends the yearly commemoration: ‘When I became a mother I thought: how for God’s sake did my mother manage? This kept me occupied, and so I thought, I will have to go to these commemorations.’³⁰⁵ Attending is an obligation, and an honouring of her mother.

At first Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid thought that a monument would not be necessary, also because a monument would be very expensive. Eventually, she believes that it is good that there is a place to meet each other: ‘It is a meeting place. You can go there, you can touch it... You can tell the children or people, I would like to have that children know a little what happened there.’³⁰⁶ In her opinion, it is valuable to have a place to go to and to remember together. Because of the monument, such a place is created to remember Ravensbrück.

Remembrance of the activities of women during the war is important to Stien Spier-Pullen. She thinks that the message of remembering what women did during the war could and should be communicated by a monument.

Bram Grisnigt is the only male former prisoner who is still able to attend the ceremony. He thinks that a monument is an important memorial space. When he made his first visit to the monument together with his wife, around the year 2000, he was disturbed by the fact that there was no commemoration of the male prisoners of Ravensbrück:

³⁰⁴ Marianne Burgers-van Dam: ‘Zelfs als ik erover vertel dan is het moeilijk te geloven dat ik dit allemaal heb meegemaakt, als ik de herdenking bijwoon dan zit ik aan haar te denken, dat gaat niet langs me heen maar ik sluit me er ergens toch voor af. Ik ben aanwezig en afwezig, ik wil eigenlijk afwezig zijn omdat ik het niet aan kan aanwezig te zijn. Ik doe ook moeite om elk jaar naar Amsterdam te gaan. Ik denk dat ik dat verplicht ben aan mijn zusje, ik ga ook voor haar.’

³⁰⁵ Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: ‘Toen ik zelf moeder werd toen dacht ik: hoe heeft mijn moeder dat in godsnaam gedaan. Dan ben je er veel meer mee bezig en toen dacht ik nu moet ik ook naar die herdenkingen gaan.’

³⁰⁶ Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid: ‘Het is een ontmoetingsplaats, Je kunt er naar toe gaan, je kunt het aanraken, je kunt kinderen of mensen er over vertellen, ik wil wel graag dat kinderen iets weten over hoe het daar was.’

‘It disturbed me very much that there was no remembrance of the male camp. We noticed the wording on the monument³⁰⁷ and then we thought: how can that be, there is no reference made to the men. I contacted the Committee but they seemed unaware of the fact that there were also men in that camp.’³⁰⁸

He points to a very important aspect of the monument: is it only meant to commemorate women of Ravensbrück as is stated on the monument? Or may other groups be included in the commemoration? With the aging of himself and his wife, Bram Grisnigt has difficulties to travel and to attend the ceremony. He makes an effort and tries to go every year in order to lay flowers in remembrance of the male former prisoners. If he cannot make it to the commemoration, he will ask someone else to lay these flowers. He misses the social contacts at the commemoration. In 2009, he was asked to give a speech at the commemoration: ‘Very special that a male was asked to say something, very nice.’³⁰⁹ There are also former prisoners who do not think that the monument is an important element in the commemoration of Ravensbrück. Mieke van den Burger-Steensma belongs to this group. After the war, she was able to talk about her experiences with her family and friends. On a regular basis she would meet with some of the former prisoners with whom she kept in touch after her return from Ravensbrück. She had arranged with the group of friends that they would meet annually. She does not include the monument in her commemoration of Ravensbrück. Since the war, everybody has gone his own way. Another issue was the conflict between the communist group of former prisoners and those who were not communist. She belonged to the non-communist site and this was a reason for her not to participate in official commemorations. She was, and is not very much in favour of commemoration ceremonies with huge crowds, but she accompanied a couple of times the Committee on the yearly trip to Ravensbrück which is organized for students. Due to her age, it is not possible to join this trip any longer. She wanted very much to meet all the people she met during the trips again and decided to go to the Museumplein. In 2010 she attended for the first time the yearly commemoration. Her main reason was to meet each other again, to share memories, thus her reason for attending is social: ‘It is good to be together and to lay flowers together. It reminds me of how we always helped each other, and put our arms around each other if one of us was near to collapsing.’³¹⁰ After the war, but also nowadays, she does not need official commemorations to remember the dear ones who died in Ravensbrück or in one of the other sub camps. There is no added value for her in attending official commemorations:

³⁰⁷ The text on the monument refers to the women of Ravensbrück by explicitly stating ‘to her’ and not ‘to them’: ‘to her who persevered to the utmost in saying no to fascism.’

³⁰⁸ Bram Grisnigt: ‘Het stoorde me toen erg dat er geen herinnering was aan het mannenkamp. We zagen de tekst op het monument en toen dachten we: hoe kan dat nou, waarom staat er niks over de mannen? Ik heb toen contact opgenomen met het Comité en het leek wel alsof ze niet wisten dat er ook mannen in dat kamp gezeten hadden.’

³⁰⁹ Bram Grisnigt: ‘Heel bijzonder dat een man daar werd gevraagd iets te vertellen, dat vond ik heel mooi.’

³¹⁰ Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: ‘Het is goed samen te zijn en samen bloemen te leggen. Het herinnert me aan hoe we elkaar altijd hebben geholpen en de armen om elkaar heen hebben geslagen als één van ons dreigde te bezwijken.’

‘I prefer to commemorate all those people who played such a big role in my life privately, on the fourth of May, I am just watching television and then my feelings are much more intense, apart from the fact that my commemoration is not restricted to just one day, I do it very often, on birthdays of the women who died and so on. I do not think I can have the same feelings at a general monument.’³¹¹

Beppie Ottenbros-Bosboom is Jewish and lost her whole family (except a sister who went into hiding) during the Shoah. Until recently, she had never attended a commemoration at the Ravensbrück monument. She was a prisoner of Kamp Vught and Auschwitz, and after Auschwitz she has been in Ravensbrück for three months until she was liberated. For that reason she used to attend commemorations at Kamp Vught and not at the Ravensbrück monument. She does not feel ‘engaged’ in the Ravensbrück commemoration, mainly because she has little memory of her time in the Ravensbrück concentration camp and she does not know any of the former prisoners.

She does not like commemoration ceremonies at a monument: ‘That does not affect me, just chunks of stones. It is cold, I go because I have to go.’³¹² She has what she calls her ‘own graveyard’ for her members of the family who died in the Shoah:

‘I have a book³¹³ with all the names, which is very important to me. I had a look in it the other day. It is the graveyard of my family. They will not be forgotten. I hold them in my head and they will stay there. Now and then I take a look and read their names. Otherwise you would go to a graveyard. I will sit down and read their names. This is not cold, this is not cold stone.’³¹⁴

Hebe Kohlbrugge has never seen the monument at the Museumplein, nor does she know what it looks like. She is not interested in one separate monument for each camp. Her idea is to concentrate all commemorative acts in one commemoration ceremony and at one place that matters. Not the Dam in Amsterdam, but for instance Kamp Westerbork, a place that matters and one monument in remembrance of all camps. She considers education to be more important than commemoration.

Communist versus non-communist

At the time of erection of the monument, there were two committees representing former prisoners of Ravensbrück. They both had a communist signature, the Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück maybe more than the Nederlands Comité Ravensbrück.³¹⁵ During the years after the unveiling, the commit-

³¹¹ Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: ‘Ik herdenk liever in mijn eigen omgeving thuis op de vierde mei en dan zit ik te kijken naar de televisie en dan beleef ik het veel intenser afgezien van dat ik niet één dag per jaar herdenk, ik doe het zo vaak bij de verjaardagen van de vrouwen die zijn omgekomen. Ik geloof niet dat ik dezelfde gevoelens kan hebben bij een algemeen monument.’

³¹² Beppie Ottenbros-Bosboom: ‘Dat doet me niks. Een brok stenen. Het is koud, ik ga er naar toe omdat het moet.’

³¹³ In 1995, *In Memoriam/‘Lezecher’* was published, a book with the names of 103,000 Dutch victims of the Shoah.

³¹⁴ Beppie Ottenbros-Bosboom: ‘Ik heb een boek met alle namen, dat is heel belangrijk voor mij, ik heb er gisteren nog in gekeken. Het is de begraafplaats van mijn familie. Ze worden niet vergeten. Ik heb ze in mijn kop en daar blijven ze in. Ik kijk er af en toe in en lees hun namen. Anders zou je naar een begraafplaats gaan. Ik ga zitten en lees hun namen. Dit is niet koud, dit is geen koude steen.’

³¹⁵ WITTHUIS: *Na het kamp* 162.

tees became closer, and this is resulted in one official Committee around 1978.³¹⁶ However, for some it is difficult to cope with the disputes of the past.

Mieke van den Burger-Steensma still feels a communist ‘atmosphere’ at the commemoration and this is bothering her:

‘I still feel the line of demarcation. At the ceremony a couple of women were walking behind that banner which is a symbol from the time when all that communist women walked very pontifically behind that banner to the monument, and my goodness, there was that banner again! I was glad that I was standing at the back because I thought I am not going to walk behind that banner!’³¹⁷

In the past, Hebe Kohlbrugge wanted to have nothing to do with the Committees and the disputes between them because of their communist alliances. She does not know anybody from the present Committee, and has never contacted any of the former prisoners. This affected her way of commemoration of Ravensbrück a lot. She is not interested in meeting women who have been in Ravensbrück, just like herself, but whom she does not know. She has no feelings regarding such a gathering and thinks that it is a rather ‘foolish’ thing to do:

‘Do I have say to some honest Dutch woman whom I don’t even know: Oh, how bad it was, do you remember? I think that is silly. I once met a woman from the Czech Republic, and she said to me: “*Jeder hat ihr eigenes Ravensbrück*” and that is true, I have totally different experiences than Mrs. Jansen. You don’t compete in who suffered the most, that is insane, you don’t do that. It is much more important to tell the youth of today how it was and what truly happened. I give lectures at schools and in prisons and that is something different from speaking with Mrs. Jansen how miserable it was.’³¹⁸

To summarize: Former prisoners have different reasons for attending. Most important is remembering the female victims of Ravensbrück and the activities of women during the war. Some speak of an ‘obligation’ to attend and to remember. Remembering the male victims has been introduced since 2004 with the unveiling of a plaque but is still an important reason to attend for the only former male

³¹⁶ WITHUIS: *Na het kamp* 331.

³¹⁷ Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: ‘Ik voel nog steeds een scheidingslijn. Tijdens de ceremonie liepen een paar vrouwen achter die vlag welke een symbool is uit de tijd dat al die communistische vrouwen pontificaal achter die vlag aanliepen naar het monument en verhipt, die vlag was daar weer! Dus gelukkig stond ik achteraan ik dacht ik loop niet achter die vlag aan!’

³¹⁸ Hebe Kohlbrugge: ‘Moet ik dan tegen een of andere brave Nederlandse vrouw, die ik niet eens ken, zeggen “ach wat was het vreselijk, weet je nog?” Ik vind dat dwaas. Ik ontmoette eens een vrouw uit Tsjechië en die zei tegen mij: “*Jeder hat ihr eigenes Ravensbrück*” en dat is waar. Ik heb totaal iets anders beleefd dan mevrouw Jansen. Je gaat niet met elkaar oppijpen wie het het beroerdste heeft gehad, dat doe je niet. Het is veel belangrijker om de jeugd van tegenwoordig te vertellen hoe het was en wat er werkelijk gebeurd is. Ik geef lezingen op scholen en in gevangenissen en dat vind ik iets heel anders dan nog eens met mevrouw Jansen praten over hoe naar of het was.’

participant. The social aspect of the commemoration is also mentioned as an important reason to attend.

Some of the participants oppose to attending the commemoration. Their arguments are that a monument is only ‘cold stone’, that you will not feel the same solidarity as in the camp, and that commemorating a single camp is not necessary.

3.3.4 Attending the ceremony: place

The choice of the Museumplein as location was a well thought of decision by the Committee: a public place in the centre of Amsterdam. Most first generation attendants of the ceremony appreciate the Museumplein and are not disturbed by ongoing activities during the ceremony, like people playing soccer, or people walking their dogs.

Deborah Maarsen-Laufer thinks the Museumplein is a wonderful place for the monument. She is Jewish, and she would have preferred a place in Amsterdam in the neighbourhood where the Jewish people used to live before, and during the war. That would have been more appropriate with regard to all the Jewish people who have been deported.

According to Marianne Burgers-van Dam, place and monument belong together, they are united: ‘It is a twofoldness, there must be a place to commemorate.’³¹⁹ She thinks that an explanation about the monument would be useful, it disturbs her that apparently many people passing by have no idea what the monument is about: ‘When we are sitting there during the commemoration, you see people passing by the Museumplein and it is obvious that they think: what are all those people doing there? If only some kind of board explaining what it is could be placed.’³²⁰ She does not mind that people ‘use’ the monument to have their lunch, but then again, it is important that they realize themselves where they are: ‘It disturbs, almost hurts me. It is such a wonderful monument and almost nobody knows that it is there and why it is there.’³²¹

Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid agrees and thinks it is important that people know the monument and also understand the symbolism of the monument including the sound. Once she had been to Amsterdam for a day trip with a couple of friends and she had said to them: ‘Look, there you have the monument and they didn’t even know.’³²²

Selma van de Perre-Velleman says that it is not the monument itself that gives support: it is the gathering to commemorate at the monument which is most important. She thinks that the monument offers a ‘core’ to go to, and to meet people who all have the same thoughts:

³¹⁹ Marianne Burgers-van Dam: ‘Het is een twee-eenheid, er moet een plek zijn om te kunnen herdenken.’

³²⁰ Marianne Burgers-van Dam: ‘Als we daar zitten tijdens de herdenking dan zie je de mensen voorbij lopen over het Museumplein en dan kan je zien dat ze denken wat doen die mensen daar? Al staat er maar een bord bij wat het is.’

³²¹ Marianne Burgers-van Dam: ‘Het stoort me, het doet me bijna pijn, het is zo’n prachtig monument en bijna niemand weet dat het daar is en waarom het daar is.’

³²² Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid: ‘Kijk daar heb je het monument en ze wisten het niet eens.’

‘I have been around the monument when there is no commemoration, and yes, you will look at the monument and you will think that is our monument, but... the objective of commemoration is the gathering of people, that is the biggest idea and the monument is also needed because it would be different if we would commemorate and the monument would not be there.’³²³

Participants consider the Museumplein an appropriate location for the monument. However, most participants think it is important to know what the monument stands for. It is fine if people use the monument for daily business, but they have to know the background of Ravensbrück and the message of the monument.

3.3.5 Place: ‘neutral’ versus ‘where it all happened’

There is a difference in how former prisoners experience a monument at a ‘neutral’ location like the Museumplein versus a monument at the place ‘where it all happened’: Ravensbrück.

Mieke van den Burger-Steensma says that the combination of place, monument, and commemoration ritual is what really matters. She does not ‘like’ the monument Tragende in Ravensbrück:

‘The monument in Amsterdam means negativity to me and I also experienced many good things in that hell... Nor do I experience that in Ravensbrück near that huge monument the Tragende high in the sky, the Tragende is below in the Schwedtsee where we throw our red roses. This monument does not make me cry, neither does the monument in Ravensbrück, but the Schwedtsee itself makes me cry and also the wall with all those names. It makes that you stand still for a moment to think about all those people who have been so important.’³²⁴

She considers the ritual commemoration practice more important and more emotional than the monuments:

‘The monument itself, Tragende, is rather pompous. We did not think it was pretty, but what touched us a lot was throwing roses in the lake, the Schwedtsee. That is where the ashes of a lot of

³²³ Selma van de Perre-Velleman: ‘Ik ben wel bij het monument geweest toen er geen herdenking was en ja, dan kijk je naar het monument en dan denk je dat is ons monument... maar het doel van herdenken is een bijeenkomen van mensen, dat is het grootste idee er van en het monument is ook nodig want het zou anders zijn als we zouden herdenken en het monument zou er niet zijn.’

³²⁴ Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: ‘Het monument in Amsterdam betekent negativiteit voor mij en ik heb zoveel positiefs meegemaakt in die hel. Dat voel ik ook niet bij dat grote monument in Ravensbrück de Tragende, hoog in de lucht, de Tragende is daar beneden in de Schwedtsee, met de rode rozen die we daar hebben gegooit. Dit is voor mij geen monument waar de tranen van over mijn wangen biggelen, zelfs dat in Ravensbrück niet maar wél de Schwedtsee en wél de muur met de namen waardoor je eens even stilstaat om al aan die mensen te denken die zo belangrijk zijn geweest.’

our friends are. Then I am deeply touched but not by that huge, communist monument. The ritual is much more important than the monument.’³²⁵

According to her, both, the monument in Amsterdam and in Ravensbrück, represent a communist memory of the camp: ‘It is also pompous, communist, because the communists erected the monument in Amsterdam, and they draw the line: here we are!’³²⁶

According to Selma van de Perre-Velleman, Tragende is very emotional, and the ritual of throwing roses in the Schwedtsee is truly what commemoration is about: ‘I always think that is a wonderful moment and that is truly commemoration.’³²⁷ At first, she never wanted to visit Germany again because she feared that emotions would take hold of her, but now she is able to travel to Ravensbrück together with students from a teacher training college. She thought it would be a good idea if future teachers learn from an eyewitness what happened in Ravensbrück: ‘When I go to Ravensbrück, it does not touch me anymore. I feel it is my duty to teach those students because I am one of the few who is left.’³²⁸

The aspect of solidarity is mentioned by Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid. She thinks that the name of the monument Tragende is well chosen because that is how it was: ‘We carried each other indeed, both literally and figuratively.’³²⁹

3.3.6 Form and symbolism

In comparison with the monuments in Ravensbrück, the monument at the Museumplein is different regarding form and symbolism. The monument in Amsterdam is abstract and the monuments in Ravensbrück are all figurative and represent the presence and endurances of female prisoners, like for instance the monument Tragende. The artists intended to bring their message in the first place by means of sound and light, and in the second place through the text on the monument. It is interesting to see how former prisoners react to this concept chosen by the artists and agreed upon by the Committee.

There is only one former prisoner, Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid, who knows what the sound and light stand for. She never actually heard the sound of the monument but knows what it stands for:

³²⁵ Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: ‘Het monument zelf, Dragende, is nogal pompeus, we vonden het niet mooi maar wat ons erg raakte was het gooien van rozen in het meertje, de Schwedtsee, waar de as van vele vriendinnen ligt. Dan ben ik diep geraakt, maar niet door dat grote, communistische monument. Het ritueel is veel belangrijker dan het monument.’

³²⁶ Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: ‘Het is ook pompeus, communistisch, omdat de communisten het monument in Amsterdam hebben opgericht en ze hebben de lijn doorgetrokken: hier zijn wij.’

³²⁷ Selma van de Perre-Velleman: ‘Ik vind dat altijd een prachtig moment en dat is werkelijk herdenken.’

³²⁸ Selma van de Perre-Velleman: ‘Als ik naar Ravensbrück ga dan doet het me niets meer, ik voel dat het mijn plicht is om die studenten iets bij te dragen omdat ik één van de weinigen ben die er nog is.’

³²⁹ Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid: ‘We droegen elkaar inderdaad, letterlijk en figuurlijk.’

‘It is a heartbeat. I read about it and I think, yes, well-thought. I think it is a nice symbol, but people have to know the link. It would be nice and I think that I would tell them this is our heartbeat, they don’t know that our hearts were for each other in those days.’³³⁰

She has her own interpretation of the symbolism of the monument. When she considers the plates of the monument she imagines women standing at roll call in the camp: ‘Women standing at roll call... very strong at roll call.’³³¹

Some of them appreciate the monument and also the sound and light symbolism. One of them is Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: ‘I like the design of the monument very much, I also like the noise it makes, there is something menacing in it. The whole war thing is threatening so I think it is appropriate, it is not possible to play cheerful music.’³³²

Marianne Burgers-van Dam likes modern art so it does not disturb her that the monument is abstract and not figurative: ‘It is very special, I always promote it, in its simplicity and so on... and the noise playing around and the location is so nice.’³³³ She does not know what the artists mean with the monument. The sound does not evoke any special feelings or recall special memories. She likes the noise because it activates the monument but she can also understand that people do not comprehend the interpretation of the noise. She can imagine that there are people who do not like the monument.

Bram Grisnigt thinks it is a striking and living monument. In his opinion they have tried to simulate the noise of a crematorium with that chimney in the middle. Maybe this is meant as a message to younger people, but to him it is rather disturbing because it reminds him of all kind of things.

Mieke van den Burger-Steensma was astounded when she heard the sound of the monument for the first time. She holds a strong opinion on both the monument and sound:

‘It is neither ugly nor nice, but when I noticed that column and that noise coming out of it... it must be an imagination of the chimney of a crematorium. How could they do that... and not only me, a witness, but also my daughters said so... and then there is also a noise, then you think it is bad taste, if they would have left the noise out than I might have thought, yes: tight but pretty en that spoiled a lot for me. I have seen the chimney in Ravensbrück upon arrival, when we were waiting, lying against that hill because there was no place for us in the barracks. And we saw that the sky

³³⁰ Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid: ‘Het is een hartslag. Ik heb er over gelezen en dan denk ik ja, dat hebben ze goed bedacht. Ik vind het wel een mooi symbool maar de mensen moeten ook weten waar het op slaat. Het zou wel fijn zijn en ik denk dat ik het wel zou zeggen dat het onze hartslag is en dat we toen ook hart voor elkaar hadden.’

³³¹ Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid: ‘Vrouwen die op appèl staan, heel sterk op appèl.’

³³² Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: ‘Ik vind het ontwerp van het monument erg mooi en ik vind het geluid ook heel toepasselijk, het heeft iets dreigends. Maar het hele oorlogsgebeuren is dreigend, je kunt daar moeilijk vrolijke muziek laten horen.’

³³³ Marianne Burgers-van Dam: ‘Ik vind het heel bijzonder, want ik maak er altijd reclame voor, in zijn eenvoud en zo... dat geluid dat er doorheen speelt en dat het zo’n mooie plek heeft.’

turned deep red and you smelled the pungent smell of burning flesh and hair... So that is why this chimney of a crematorium in the Amsterdam monument does not do any good to me.³³⁴

The monument does not bring up the important memories from the camp like solidarity and taking care for each other. Mieke van den Burger-Steensma:

‘I have in my memory an incredible bond with different kind of people: Jews, communists, etcetera, and that was our rescue because it was impossible to do it on your own. That is what I have carried on in my life but I do not find that back at the monument.’³³⁵

Neither does Deborah Maarsen-Laufer feel any cohesion with her former prisoners at the commemoration. This could originate from stressing the Jewish accent of the monument which is lacking in her opinion: ‘I do not feel any bond with the women attending the commemoration.’³³⁶

In contrast, Selma van de Perre-Velleman does feel an alliance: ‘The monument is important because of the group of friends who get together; it is the same alliance we felt in Ravensbrück.’³³⁷ She is Jewish but was sentenced for her work in the resistance under a non-Jewish identity. She lost many family members in the Shoah. She thinks it is better to be together and commemorate all together on the same day instead of doing this on an individual basis. She feels strong support from all those people present at the commemoration.

Lotty Huffener is also Jewish and lost her family in the Shoah. She herself has been to Auschwitz and met a lot of women she had already met in Kamp Vught, again in Reichenbach, an outside camp of Ravensbrück. She has been in contact with many of these women ever since the war. On a regular basis she attends the yearly ceremony. She appreciates the monument very much: ‘The light is very nice. I see the women in the monument.’³³⁸

³³⁴ Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: ‘Ik vond het niet lelijk maar ik vond het ook niet mooi. Maar toen ontdekte ik dat de zuil in het midden de verbeelding was van een schoorsteen van een crematorium, toen dacht ik hoe hebben ze dat kunnen doen en niet alleen ik die het meegemaakt heeft maar ook mijn dochters zeiden dat en dan komt er ook nog een ruis uit dan denk ik wat is dat onkies... als ze die zuil weggelaten hadden ik geloof dat ik dan gedacht had, ja strak maar mooi en dat heeft voor mij een heleboel vergald. Ik heb de schoorsteen gezien toen we aankwamen in Ravensbrück en we moesten wachten, liggend tegen die heuvel aan omdat er geen plaats was in de barakken. En we zagen dat de hemel donkerrood kleurde en je rook de penetrante lucht van verbranding van haren en vlees. Dus daarom kan het geen goed bij me doen dat in het Amsterdamse monument die crematoriumpijp stond.’

³³⁵ Mieke van den Burger-Steensma: ‘Ik heb in mijn herinnering die ongelofelijke verbondenheid met alle soorten mensen: Joden, communisten en noem maar op en dat is onze redding geweest want je kon het niet alleen. Dat is wat ik voel dat ik heb meegenomen in mijn leven en dat vind ik niet terug in dat monument.’

³³⁶ Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: ‘Ik voel helemaal geen verbondenheid met de vrouwen die aanwezig zijn bij de herdenking.’

³³⁷ Selma van de Perre-Velleman: ‘Het monument is belangrijk vanwege de groep vriendinnen die samenkomt, het is dezelfde verbondenheid die we ook in Ravensbrück voelden.’

³³⁸ Lotty Huffener-Vellen: ‘Het licht is erg mooi. Ik zie de vrouwen in het monument.’

3.3.7 Male or female remembrance?

Since the year 2000, a discussion has come up whether the monument could also be a place to commemorate male prisoners of Ravensbrück.

One of the participants, Stien Spier-Pullen, was an active member around the time of the erection of the monument. She thinks it is very important that Dutch women who were active in the resistance are commemorated. She does not think that the monument at the Museumplein is successful in that because it is abstract and it is not a representation of a woman. It is a good thing that the wording on the monument refers to the women of Ravensbrück because otherwise it is not a special monument:

‘It is an ordinary monument. You could use it for anything, so to say! But okay, it says so in big letters and that is very important and I just think it is important that there is a monument for women. Most of the times, men are more commemorated than women and it is also important to commemorate the efforts of women during the war, they have both the same rights to commemoration. I think that they both have the same rights to be commemorated. It is important to have a good monument especially to women.’³³⁹

On the other hand, there is the opinion of one of the few former Dutch male prisoners, Bram Grisnigt. After the war, he left the Netherlands for a long period of time. He spent most of his professional career outside of the Netherlands: ‘When you are young, you push it away. Perhaps not when I would have stayed in the Netherlands, I don’t know. But when you are young you still have to build on your future.’³⁴⁰

Therefore, he became involved in the commemoration of Ravensbrück only at an older age. He started to look for other former Dutch male prisoners of Ravensbrück and found ten of them. In the meantime, most of them have died and at the yearly commemoration he is now the only Dutch male former prisoner present. When he attended the commemoration for the first time, there were four of them. He made a lot of effort and it took years to organize a plaque in remembrance of the male prisoners of Ravensbrück:

‘There were other men who said “let it go”, but I said “no, I don’t let it go”. I asked the Committee if it would be possible to put a modest plaque of 40 by 60 at the monument of the women with the

³³⁹ Stien Spier-Pullen: ‘Het is een gewoon monument. Je kunt het overal voor gebruiken, kan je wel zeggen. Maar goed, het staat er in grote letters op en dat is heel belangrijk. Ik vind het gewoon heel belangrijk dat er een monument voor is voor vrouwen. Meestal worden mannen meer herdacht dan vrouwen en het is ook belangrijk om de daden van vrouwen te herdenken. Ik vind dat ze allebei dezelfde rechten hebben om herdacht te worden. Het is belangrijk een goed monument speciaal voor vrouwen te hebben.’

³⁴⁰ Bram Grisnigt: ‘Als je jong bent dan schuif je het weg, misschien niet als ik in Holland was blijven wonen weet ik niet maar als je jong bent dan moet je je toekomst nog opbouwen.’

following text: Also in respectful remembrance of the men and boys who died for the same ideals in the male concentration camp.³⁴¹

In 2004, a plaque was put on the back of the monument with a different text: *1939-1945 Ter nagedachtenis aan de 90.000 vrouwen en kinderen en de 20.000 mannen die in het concentratiekamp Ravensbrück zijn omgebracht* ('1939-1945 In remembrance of 90,000 women and children and 20,000 men who were killed in concentration camp Ravensbrück'). Bram Grisnigt thinks that the women of the Committee have devised this text. Although he is not too happy with the positioning,³⁴² he is very happy with the fact that the plaque was finally installed:

'My first thought was to put it at the front of the monument and to put it on a little post with the history of the camp, you see that with other monuments as well, a sort of explanation, but everything was made so difficult at that time, why do something simple if it can be done difficult.'³⁴³

Bram Grisnigt regrets that he felt like he had to:

'[...] prove that there had been a male camp as well. It is the same as when is said: there have not been any Jews and I had already been in contact with two Jewish men who had been as boys in the camp of the women. One lives now in Israel and the other one in South-Africa. I contacted them. They were as little boys with their mother. At a certain age they were transferred to the male camp.'³⁴⁴

He regrets that most of the speakers at the commemoration only refer to the women of Ravensbrück:

'They only speak of the women, and it has only been since a couple of years that the chair of the Committee mentions in her speech the male. Why is that? If one speaks about Ravensbrück, people always think that only women have been there, that is the point, but all the other camps, let's take for example Neuengamme or Natzweiler, men or women are never mentioned separately, one says *the camp*, but there have been women in Neuengamme, and the same with Kamp Vught, there have

³⁴¹ Bram Grisnigt: 'Er waren andere mannen die zeiden "laat toch lopen" maar ik zei "nee, ik laat het niet lopen." Ik vroeg het Comité of het mogelijk zou zijn om bij het vrouwenmonument een bescheiden plaquette aan te brengen van 40 bij 60 met de tekst: Ook in eerbiedige herinnering aan de mannen en jongens die voor dezelfde idealen in het mannenconcentratiekamp omkwamen.'

³⁴² On the backside of the monument, close to the ground. However: as said before this plaque was removed in 2013 and a new plaque was put at the front of the monument in remembrance of all women, men, and children who died in Ravensbrück.

³⁴³ Bram Grisnigt: 'Mijn eerste gedachte was om het aan de voorkant van het monument te plaatsen op een paaltje met de geschiedenis van het kamp zoals je wel vaker ziet bij andere monumenten, een soort van uitleg, maar alles werd toen zo moeilijk gemaakt, waarom iets makkelijk doen als het ook moeilijk kan.'

³⁴⁴ Bram Grisnigt: 'Bewijzen dat er ook een mannenkamp was geweest. Het is hetzelfde als er wordt gezegd: er zijn geen Joden geweest en ik was al in contact geweest met twee Joodse mannen die als jongens in het vrouwenkamp hebben gezeten. Eén woont nu in Israël en de andere in Zuid-Afrika. Ik nam contact met ze op. Als kleine jongens waren ze bij hun moeder. Op een bepaalde leeftijd zijn ze toen overgeplaatst naar het mannenkamp.'

been men and women... and Auschwitz. But Ravensbrück has been picked out and has become, why, a separate organization of women camps. I was glad that I could explain that when I held my speech at the commemoration.³⁴⁵

In 2009, he was asked to give a speech at the yearly commemoration. In this speech he talked about his experiences in the male camp of Ravensbrück. He wanted to explain the circumstances to the audience. Bram Grisnigt was imprisoned in several camps and for him Ravensbrück was the worst of all. The humiliations and sufferance he had to endure were still hurting him so bad that he was not able to explain them. In his own words: these will stay his 'hidden memories'. In April 1945, when the Red Army was approaching, he was sent on 'Death March', together with 1,500 fellow prisoners. Only 200 of them survived. He himself escaped and returned to Ravensbrück which had been deserted by the Germans. Only prisoners who were ill had been left behind. The others had been sent on Death March like himself. In the sick barrack of the male camp he found seven Dutch male prisoners. They needed immediate help and this help came from the women camp. He became aware of Ravensbrück women when the first help for these prisoners was given by women from the women's camp. Although they were in a bad condition, they came to take care.³⁴⁶ He says: 'It was as if I saw angels.'³⁴⁷

Some of the female former prisoners were, during their time of detention, not aware that there was also a male camp in Ravensbrück. Marianne Burgers-van Dam says: 'I can tell you a funny story. When we marched out of the camp when we were liberated we noticed all those men! We had never noticed before that there was also a camp for men in Ravensbrück.'³⁴⁸ She thinks that the monument is meant for women because it says so on the monument in large print. She would not mind if the name of the monument, Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, would be altered to honour the men. It is not necessary to erect a separate monument but it is important to refer to the fact that men were also imprisoned in Ravensbrück. It is possible to 'share' the monument. However, she does not agree with people who want to burn candles instead of laying flowers from a religious perspective: 'Laying flowers is the normal, accepted way of commemoration.'³⁴⁹

Marijke van Elsberg-Kiewid thinks that originally the monument is intended as a monument to commemorate the women of Ravensbrück but she has no objection if the men are included in the commemoration. Finally, they have also been in Ravensbrück, and experienced a lot of ordeals.

³⁴⁵ Bram Grisnigt: 'Er wordt alleen maar over vrouwen gesproken en het is pas sinds enkele jaren dat de voorzitter van het Comité de mannen noemt in haar toespraak. Waarom is dat? Als iemand over Ravensbrück spreekt dan denken mensen altijd dat er alleen vrouwen hebben gezeten, dat is het punt, maar al die andere kampen, neem bijvoorbeeld Neuengamme of Natzweiler, daar worden mannen of vrouwen nooit apart genoemd daar wordt over *het kamp* gesproken. In Neuengamme, en hetzelfde in *Kamp Vught*, daar zijn mannen en vrouwen geweest... en Auschwitz. Maar Ravensbrück is er uitgehaald en dat is een aparte organisatie van vrouwenkampen geworden. Ik was blij dat ik dat kon uitleggen toen ik mijn toespraak hield tijdens de herdenking.'

³⁴⁶ Speech at the commemoration ceremony April 19, 2009, personal communication, speech in possession of author.

³⁴⁷ Bram Grisnigt: 'Het was alsof ik engelen zag.'

³⁴⁸ Marianne Burgers-van Dam: 'Ik kan u een grappig verhaal vertellen. Toen we bij de bevrijding het kamp uitmarcheerden toen zagen we al die mannen. We hadden nooit geweten dat er ook een kamp voor mannen was in Ravensbrück.'

³⁴⁹ Marianne Burgers-van Dam: 'Bloemen leggen is toch de normale aanvaarde manier van herdenken.'

Although Bram Grisnigt put a lot of effort in, the emphasis of the monument and the focus during the commemoration is still on the remembrance of women: nevertheless, male prisoners are mentioned and they are marked as victims on the memorial sign at the front of the monument.

3.3.8 Jewish remembrance

In the same line of discussion, who is remembered by means of the monument: female versus male remembrance is another discussion which is brought up by one of the Jewish former prisoners, Deborah Maarsen-Laufer.

She was only a small child when she was interned at Ravensbrück, together with her mother and two sisters. All of them survived and also her father, who was a prisoner in Buchenwald. Her mother never wanted to talk about the war because she thought that you had to look forward instead of backwards. With her sisters she is able to discuss their experiences. Because she was very young during the war, she never knows whether these experiences are her own or what she has heard from her sisters. Both her sisters have immigrated to Israel.



Candle lighting by Deborah Maarsen-Laufer, April 15, 2013

She regrets that there is no special attention given to the Jewish former prisoners of Ravensbrück and she misses a Jewish input into the ceremony. For that reason, she lights a candle instead of laying flowers in honour of the victims: 'That is our way of commemoration. We burn a candle instead of

laying flowers. Since a couple of years, I have burned a candle just because I want to do it in my Jewish way. They allow that fortunately.³⁵⁰

A local elementary school, the Nicolaas Maesschool, has adopted the monument. Each year during the commemoration, students from this school recite poems, and lay flowers. Most former prisoners appreciate the involvement of the youth in the commemoration ceremony. They think it is important with regard to the future when the first generation survivors will have disappeared.

Deborah Maarsen-Laufer regrets that this school is not a Jewish school: 'I regret that. But maybe I speak too much from my own point of view. It is probably because there are no Jewish people in the Committee, I regret that a lot, but for me, on my own, it is impossible to change this.'³⁵¹ She would also like to have said a prayer for the dead:

'We live according to the orthodox Jewish religion and according to our religion in order to remember our deaths we have to say the Yiskor prayer. Yes I would like to have someone say the Yiskor prayer at the commemoration. But it is difficult to change that. It is organized in a certain way by a small group of women and you have to keep to that.'³⁵²

She has once given an address at the yearly commemoration, in her status as 'youngest survivor of Ravensbrück'. The issue of the Jewish accent evokes emotions: 'I always feel sad when I return from the ceremony but also a little frustrated.'³⁵³

Regarding a Jewish accent of the commemoration, the same conclusion can be made with regard to the male 'accent' in the commemoration: main emphasis is put on the remembrance of the female prisoners of Ravensbrück in general, and *not* on special groups of prisoners like male or Jewish prisoners.

3.4 The yearly commemoration at the Museumplein: experiences of relatives and close friends of former Dutch prisoners

3.4.1 Relatives and friends of former prisoners

As time goes by, the group of former prisoners who is able to attend the commemoration ceremony is diminishing. With respect to the transfer of remembrance from one generation upon the next and the function and meaning of the monument in this respect, I was also interested in the opinion of the second generation. The future of the monument and what will happen to the yearly commemoration

³⁵⁰ Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: 'Dat is onze manier van herdenken. Wij steken een kaars aan in plaats van bloemen neer te leggen. Dus sinds een paar jaar steek ik een kaars aan omdat ik het op mijn Joodse manier wil doen. Gelukkig staan ze dat toe.'

³⁵¹ Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: 'Ik vind dat jammer. Maar misschien praat ik te veel vanuit mijn eigen straatje. Het komt waarschijnlijk omdat er geen Joodse mensen in het Comité zitten. Maar voor mij, in mijn eentje is het onmogelijk dat te veranderen.'

³⁵² Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: 'Wij leven orthodox joods en voor het herdenken van onze doden spreek je een bepaald gebed uit, het Yiskorgebed, ja ik had graag gewild dat iemand het Yiskorgebed zou uitspreken tijdens de ceremonie. Maar het is moeilijk dat te veranderen. Het wordt georganiseerd door een klein groepje vrouwen en daar moet je je aan houden.'

³⁵³ Deborah Maarsen-Laufer: 'Ik voel me altijd verdrietig wanneer ik terug kom van de herdenking maar ook een beetje gefrustreerd.'

are issues which are relevant and were discussed during the interviews with children of former prisoners of Ravensbrück. Ten interviews were conducted with children, grandchildren, family, and friends of former prisoners.

The interviews were taped and documented by the author. Because of privacy aspects, full names of these persons will not be given in this report:

Participant K: April and June 2010

Participant L: November 2010

Participant M: December 2010

Participant N: December 2010

Participant O: July 2010

Participant P: August 2010

Participant Q: August 2010

Participant R: August 2010)

Participant S: October 2010

Participant T: November 2010

3.4.2 The importance of the yearly commemoration to the next generation

Different reasons are given why it is important to attend the yearly ceremony. Some, like participants N and S, speak of an obligation to honour and recognize those who have suffered so much. Participant N is Jewish and commemorates through prayers and in religious practice. Attending a commemoration is important to pay respect to the people who experienced the atrocities. It is also a very inspiring event because all those people had the vitality to go on with their life after the war. But in a way there is no need to commemorate because the second generation is the evidence of the war: 'We are living, so to speak, "bombs of commemoration", do I have to know it? I know it... we are the evidence that it all happened.'³⁵⁴ Participant S thinks that commemoration at a monument is a tribute to and recognition of the former prisoners. In this respect, she considers the commemoration a 'positive meeting'. Both of them are regular attendants of the yearly ceremony at the Museumplein.

By contrast, participant K is not a regular attendant. Her parents, and in particular her mother, did not attach any value to these meetings. She had never attended a commemoration until recently. A couple of times she joined her mother on the educational trip to Ravensbrück, which is organized each year by the Committee. Just like her mother, she attaches great value to these trips. Due to her age, her mother is at present not able to travel to Ravensbrück any longer. They decided they would attend the commemoration ceremony at the Museumplein instead. Main objective for her mother, but also for her, was to meet again people whom they had met during their stay in Ravensbrück:

³⁵⁴ Participant N: 'Wij zijn als het ware "herdenkingsbommen", moet ik het weten? Ik weet het... wij zijn het bewijs dat die oorlog bestaan heeft.'

‘It gives me a good feeling to meet those people again, and it was a nice combination for me to do that at the monument. I knew about the existence of the monument but I had never been there, and then I thought I’d want to attend a commemoration and do that together with the people I know.’³⁵⁵

She explains that her mother does not need a monument to express her emotions and as a consequence she herself had never attended the ceremony. In this respect, the monument at the Museumplein has no function. On the contrary, the commemorative ceremony at the monument Tragende in Ravensbrück has made an enormous impression:

‘When we stand on the platform near the Tragende and when we throw our roses in the Schwedtsee, it is a very emotional moment. Also, because when you look over the water, the village is so close by, and those people must have known about the chimneys smoking and impossible to say *Wir haben es nicht gewusst*. In this respect, the monument has a function during the ceremony. It would have been different if we would just been in the bushes and thrown our roses in the water.’³⁵⁶

The combination of commemoration ritual, monument and being at the place where her mother suffered so much, creates meaning.

It was very emotional for her when she saw her mother walking in procession behind the banner, together with the other former prisoners:

‘You commemorate something extremely significant in the lives of those women, and in their families [...] And then I think damn, you are standing there and because you are still there, I am here and if you consider what you have done with your life after, and how you handled those issues, that is extremely well done, and serves as an example to me.’³⁵⁷

Participant M accompanies his mother to the yearly ceremony: ‘I do that just for her.’³⁵⁸ For a long time, his mother did not want to attend because of the communist signature of the monument and Committee: ‘She said: No my boy, we are not going because all of them are communists.’³⁵⁹ At some

³⁵⁵ Participant K: ‘Ik vind het fijn die mensen weer te ontmoeten en het was een mooie combinatie voor mij om dat bij het monument te doen, ik wist van het bestaan van het monument maar ik was er nooit geweest en ik dacht ik wil een keer een herdenking bijwonen en dat samen met de mensen die ik ken.’

³⁵⁶ Participant K: ‘Als we op het platform staan bij de Dragende en onze rozen in de Schwedtsee gooien is dat een heel emotioneel moment. Ook omdat als je over het water kijkt, het dorpje zo dichtbij is en die mensen moeten geweten hebben over de schoorstenen en de rook, onmogelijk te zeggen *Wir haben es nicht gewusst*. In dit opzicht verricht het monument een functie gedurende de ceremonie. Het zou anders geweest zijn als we tussen de bosjes hadden gestaan en onze rozen in het water hadden gegooid.’

³⁵⁷ Participant K: ‘Je herdenkt iets dat ongelooflijk ingrijpend is geweest in het leven van die vrouwen en van hun families [...] En dan denk ik verdorie, jij staat daar en omdat jij er nog bent, ben ik er en als je bedenkt wat je met je leven gedaan hebt daarna en hoe je met die hele problematiek bent omgegaan, dat is ongelooflijk knap en daar neem ik toch een voorbeeld aan.’

³⁵⁸ Participant M: ‘Ik doe dat alleen voor haar.’

³⁵⁹ Participant M: ‘Nee mijn jongen we gaan er niet naar toe want dat zijn allemaal communisten.’

point her opinion changed and his mother became a regular attendee of the ceremony. His father always accompanied her, but since his death, a couple of years ago, participant M is going with her instead of his father. He says that the war has always been something which ‘belonged’ to his parents, not to him. As a consequence, when he attends the commemoration he does not sit down on the chairs but stands at the side.

In contrast with participant M, participant L says that she has her own reasons for attending which are independent of her mother. For her, attending the ceremony on her own, without her mother, is a way of coming to terms with her youth when the war experiences of her mother were always present. Her mother hardly ever spoke about her experiences during the war, but participant L has always been aware of the fact that it was a ‘big thing’:

‘I knew at a very young age that something awkward had happened, but my mother, and I know this sounds a bit odd, only spoke about the nice things in the camp, for instance that they were always singing [...] I think that was very important to survive, and the rest of her life she has been singing a lot, but I stopped singing after the nursery school. For me singing was very charged with emotions, life endangering, until recently when I joined a choir.’³⁶⁰

However, she thinks that her mother never realized herself what the singing did to her, she just liked to sing and was good at it. Her mother was a regular visitor of the yearly commemorations at the Museumplein. Participant L never joined her and only started attending herself when her mother was, due to her health, unable to attend any longer. Because her mother never spoke about her experiences, she felt there was no reason in joining her: it was her mother’s ‘business’, so to say.

3.4.3 The Museumplein as *locus* of the monument

Both, participants Q and P, have a favourable opinion on the Museumplein as location for the monument.

Participant Q calls the Museumplein a good location for the monument. He is aware of the fact that former prisoners had an explicit wish to place the monument in the middle of daily life: ‘I think it is really a good place [...] They meant it like that, and I also think that it is important to put such an, in my opinion, important monument like that in the middle of the population and not at a remote place.’³⁶¹

³⁶⁰ Participant L: ‘Ik wist op een heel jonge leeftijd al dat er iets lastigs was gebeurd maar mijn moeder, en ik weet dat dit een beetje raar klinkt, sprak vooral over de leuke dingen van het kamp dus bijvoorbeeld dat ze altijd zongen [...] Ik denk dat dat heel belangrijk was om te overleven en de rest van haar leven heeft ze nog heel veel gezongen maar ik ben gestopt met zingen na de kleuterschool. Voor mij was zingen zó beladen, levensgevaarlijk, tot ik een tijdje geleden bij een koor ben gegaan.’

³⁶¹ Participant Q: ‘Ik vind dat het echt een goede plek is [...] Zij hebben het zo bedoeld maar ik vind ook dat je een naar mijn gevoel belangrijk monument te midden van de bevolking moet zetten en niet op een achteraf plaats.’

Participant P appreciates the fact that the monument is incorporated in public life because of the location at the Museumplein: 'You should not hide it.'³⁶² One of the consequences is that people 'use' the monument for daily business and sometimes show no respect: 'It is not a tomb. If you dislike that as an artist you should have made a different design.'³⁶³ With regard to the public function of the Museumplein, participant R thinks that it is not a suitable place anymore because the square has become too much a place for public festivities, like tributes to the local or national soccer teams or like pop concerts.

Participant Q would like to have a plaque with an explanation about Ravensbrück, preferably also in English in order for tourists to understand the background and the reason for the monument. He says that Ravensbrück concentration camp is now called Mahn und Gedenkstätte which means that it is now a place to warn and to commemorate. The monument at the Museumplein is at present only a place to remember. Although there is a text on the monument, meant as a warning, he thinks that the warning is less explicit because an explanation is lacking.³⁶⁴ The text on the monument neither impressed participant K. The war against fascism is of course legitimate, but the monument concerns much more, it is about what people do to each other and a slogan like 'never again' is, in her opinion, an empty slogan.

However, an explanation about the symbolism is essential. It is relevant because this is a monument on a 'neutral' place like the Museumplein, and not a place where 'awful things' happened like in the concentration camps. She says that, because she had no explanation about the symbolism, she thought at first that the artist wanted her to think of the ovens in the camps. She considers this out of place at a neutral environment like the Museumplein: 'When you visit a camp, you expect this, but I think you should not make such a reference at the Museumplein in Amsterdam.'³⁶⁵ In her opinion, this type of monument, including the sound, is not suitable for a 'neutral' place like the Museumplein.

A 'neutral' place is also less emotional than a monument in the camps, according to participant L and N. Participant L appreciates the prominent place of the monument at the Museumplein, although at this 'neutral' place she does not feel the energy which still seems to be touchable at the places of the camps like Kamp Amersfoort. Participant N thinks that the place where it all happened is also emotionally more powerful than the actual 'neutral' place far away from the camps.

However, participant L 'believes' in a combination of monument, place, and people. She did not pay any attention to the monument itself, only to the people attending the ceremony. The people are more important than the monument itself. Her daughter made a picture of a small woman laying flowers in front of one of those big steel plates: 'She was all alone in front of that big square of icy steel; I

³⁶² Participant P: 'Je moet het niet wegstoppen.'

³⁶³ Participant P: 'Het is geen graf. Als je dat als kunstenaar erg vindt dan had je een ander ontwerp moeten maken.'

³⁶⁴ As said before: in 2013 a memorial and explanatory sign was put at the front of the monument. In addition, an application for a mobile phone was developed offering information on war monuments in general and also on the Ravensbrück monument.

³⁶⁵ Participant K: 'Als je een kamp bezoekt dan verwacht je dit maar ik denk niet dat je zo'n verwijzing moet maken in Amsterdam op het Museumplein in Amsterdam.'

thought that was matching to the monument.³⁶⁶ The monument by itself does not mean anything. The stories behind the people who attend the ceremony are important.

Participant M has a similar opinion; watching the people who experienced the camps attending the ceremony is more emotional than the cold material of a monument. She accompanies her mother to the commemoration ceremony, to support her and to pay respect to the people who attend.

3.4.4 Symbolism of the monument

Participant Q calls it a ‘complicated’ monument; essentially you should not have to explain a monument. Participant R is aware of the explanation of the symbolism because he has been informed about it: as a young boy he attended the unveiling ceremony of the monument. He says that the symbol of a beacon was explained at that occasion. Although he does not appreciate modern art very much, he likes the design and the intention of the monument:

‘It is a pity that the light which makes the monument so specific does not work properly; it has never worked properly from the beginning. It is intended as a beacon but that intention failed, but of course it also has an emotional value.’³⁶⁷

He appreciates this symbol of the beacon. He calls it: ‘A warning for the future, let this never happen again. It is also the motto of the Committee.’³⁶⁸

Participant K likes the big plates very much, but has not at all understood the meaning and the idea of the beacon, which she calls the ‘chimney’. She also had not realized that the noise came from the beacon, she thought that spectators, bystanders on the Museumplein who were not attending the ceremony but workmen building up the Queen’s Day fair, were making the noise. When the school-children were reciting their poems, it was difficult to hear what they were saying: ‘And then I thought: what idiot is making such a noise, they know there is a commemoration ceremony going on, you don’t do that at such a moment?’³⁶⁹ She appreciated the simple character of the commemoration ceremony but thought that the ceremony, the ritual of commemoration, was disturbed by the noise from the beacon. The noise should have been integrated in the ceremony and explained what it was: ‘Now I have been thinking all the time that the noise symbolized the noise from the ovens in the camps [...] It disturbed me incredibly.’³⁷⁰ In her opinion, because of the noise, the monument transmits the wrong message. If she would have heard a heartbeat, like intended by the artists, she would consider that as

³⁶⁶ Participant L: ‘Ze was helemaal alleen voor dat grote vlak van ijzig metaal, ik vond dat wel bij het monument passen.’

³⁶⁷ Participant R: ‘Het is jammer dat datgene wat het monument zo specifiek maakt, het licht, niet goed werkt, het heeft vanaf het begin nooit goed gewerkt. Het is bedoeld als een baken maar dat is mislukt, maar natuurlijk heeft het ook een emotionele waarde.’

³⁶⁸ Participant R: ‘Een waarschuwing voor de toekomst, laat dit nooit meer gebeuren, dat is ook het motto van het Comité.’

³⁶⁹ Participant K: ‘En toen dacht ik welke idioot maakt er nu zo’n lawaai, ze weten toch dat er een herdenking aan de gang is, dan doe je dat toch even niet?’

³⁷⁰ Participant K: ‘Nu heb ik de hele tijd gedacht dat het geluid het geluid van de ovens in de kampen symboliseerde [...] het heeft me ongelofelijk gestoord.’

‘beautiful’ and ‘essential’. In 2010 she attended the ceremony. In that year two speeches were given and there was no music. She missed the music because when there is music, there is also time for reflection. She thinks that music is essential at a commemoration as a moment of reflection.

Participant L was also disturbed by the noise of the beacon. Neither does she understand the symbolism of the monument. She would like to have a panel with an explanation about the monument and in particular about the noise: ‘I think I would understand the monument better in that way.’³⁷¹ But the plates, standing beside each other, with the open space between them symbolized for her ‘openness’ and ‘closeness’ from the world outside and a view on the outer world.³⁷²

Participant O considers the pipe (that is: the beacon) very confusing symbolism because Ravensbrück was not intended as an extermination camp. He has never heard a heartbeat in the noise, only a rumbling noise. The symbolism of the heartbeat would be nice but probably too complicated without further explication.

3.4.5 Female or male commemoration?

Although male former prisoners are at present remembered during the commemoration, male remembrance at the monument is still an issue for some of the second generation participants. Participant Q says that the former female prisoners wanted to express with the monument the fact that Ravensbrück was set up as a concentration camp for women:

‘There have also been about 20,000 men [...] and about 132,000 women in Ravensbrück in all those years [...] and that was what it was about...women in the resistance, they should have a monument, the women of Ravensbrück they want to have a monument.’³⁷³

Participant N is disturbed by the fact that Ravensbrück is still called a women’s concentration camp while it is clear now that many men have been imprisoned as well at Ravensbrück. Participant P says that whenever you hear something in publicity about Ravensbrück it is about the women and it is called a women’s concentration camp. She understands that this is probably a difficult issue because how would you have to call it otherwise? To her, the ceremony and the people attending are more important than the monument itself.

Participant O thinks that the plaque in commemoration of the men is at an embarrassing position, near to the ground and not at eye level. However, most important is that it is there. Participant P holds the same opinion and thinks it is odd that the plaque is so small and at the back side of the monument.

³⁷¹ Participant K: ‘Ik denk dat ik het monument dan beter zou begrijpen.’

³⁷² Participant K: ‘En dan op andere plaatsen ontstaat er dus toch ruimte, dus heb je weer die doorkijk naar de buitenwereld, en dat vind ik er mooi aan.’

³⁷³ Participant Q: ‘Er hebben ook nog ongeveer 20.000 mannen gezeten [...] en ongeveer 132.000 vrouwen in Ravensbrück in al die jaren en dáár ging het ze om... vrouwen in het verzet, die horen een monument te hebben, de vrouwen van Ravensbrück die willen een monument.’

When she attends the ceremony, the first thing she does is to go to the back side of the monument and lay her flowers in remembrance of the men.

3.4.6 The future of the yearly commemoration

Participant N thinks that there is no doubt about the future of the commemoration: people should never forget what happened and always stay involved. Participant P agrees, and will continue to visit the ceremony in the future out of respect to the first generation.

Participant L says that the experiences of her mother have made a big impact on her and also on her own daughter, and for that reason commemoration can be functional also for future generations. The monument and ceremony will have a function and meaning for her with regard to the future, although it will not be evident that she will visit the ceremony each year. This is a personal choice.

Participant T thinks that in general in future times, the enthusiasm to commemorate will diminish. The Dutch are very much down to earth concerning memorial culture in her opinion. However she thinks it is very important that future generations know what has happened during the Second World War and a commemoration at a monument can be helpful in that respect. Participant R agrees with her, but does not think that the monument at the Museumplein is the right place for him personally. He does not feel the bonding with the monument that he used to have when he was little and visited the ceremony with his grandmother (who was a former prisoner of Ravensbrück). He prefers to visit other places for commemoration where he is able: 'To get the special feeling of this never again.'³⁷⁴ At first, he felt guilty about that, but now he thinks that it is important that he commemorates at a place where he himself feels most comfortable.

Participant M thinks that the monument symbolizes 'recognition' of the women of Ravensbrück. In his opinion this 'recognition' only concerns the women, the former prisoners, and not the second generation. In his opinion, commemoration will change when the first generation is not attending anymore: the element of 'recognition' of their experiences will disappear.

Participant K thinks it is important to give it a moment of thought what people can do to each other, however, the text on the monument will not be relevant in the future: 'But sloganeering "never again" that is nonsense because a lot of misery happens all the time around the whole world, but it is important to learn from the past, and return to what happened and what is incorporated in your roots.'³⁷⁵

For most participants, commemoration of the Second World War will remain important in the future. For some, the monument at the Museumplein will keep its special and specific meaning. For others this will change when the first generation has 'disappeared'.

³⁷⁴ Participant R: 'Dan krijg je het echte gevoel van dit niet meer.'

³⁷⁵ Participant K: 'Maar die kretologie van "nooit meer" dat is flauwekul want er gebeurt in de hele wereld continue een grote hoeveelheid ellende maar dat je toch probeert te leren van het verleden en teruggaat naar wat er is gebeurd en dat een deel is van je roots.'

3.5 Conclusions

The focus of this research project is on the phenomenon of postponed monuments. Postponed monuments are raised by people who lived through traumatic experiences and personal losses in the past. Many years later, they still feel the need to join efforts and erect a monument in order to have a 'place' to carry out a commemorative ritual. The initiative for these monuments is taken by 'memory communities', people who share the idea that they want to erect a monument in the public area.

Between 1945 and the 1970s, there was an anti-communist climate in the Netherlands. Many of the camp committees were communist oriented and if any initiative was taken, government authorities were opposed to funding their monuments. After the public debate about the release of the Drie van Breda, the interest in the fate of war time survivors and victims increased. As a result, authorities were more willing to provide committees with the necessary funding for their monuments. The initiative for the monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück was taken in 1972 by the Comité Vrouwen Van Ravensbrück, a group of, at that time, communist oriented former prisoners of Ravensbrück. Local authorities made the necessary funds available and, 30 years after liberation of concentration camp Ravensbrück, the monument at the Museumplein was erected. In this respect, the monument at the Museumplein may be denominated as a postponed monument.

In this chapter, the monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück is discussed with regard to function and meaning of the monument to former prisoners and their next of kin.

At the time of erection, the monument had an important function as a medium of commemoration, but also as a medium of sending a message about the need to continue the fight against new forms of fascism.

According to the participants, this last 'function' of the monument has lost its meaning. The monument is important in the remembrance of the victims of Ravensbrück, but the 'warning' function of the monument is not important anymore.

In the interviews with participants, the function and meaning of the monument was discussed in the context of the yearly commemoration at the Museumplein. The commemoration ceremony may be described as a 'general' ritual, with well-known elements like speeches, songs and/or music, children reciting poems, and laying flowers by former prisoners, relatives, and by other war related organizations. The focus during the commemoration is still on 'women' of the resistance. However, some of the former prisoners would like to emphasize their own personal 'accent' on this commemoration: male, female, or Jewish. Others still worry that the 'communist' accent is most important, for instance, when the former prisoners walk in procession behind the banner to the monument. This banner is still considered by some as a sign of the communist signature of the Committee and accordingly also of the monument and commemoration ceremony.

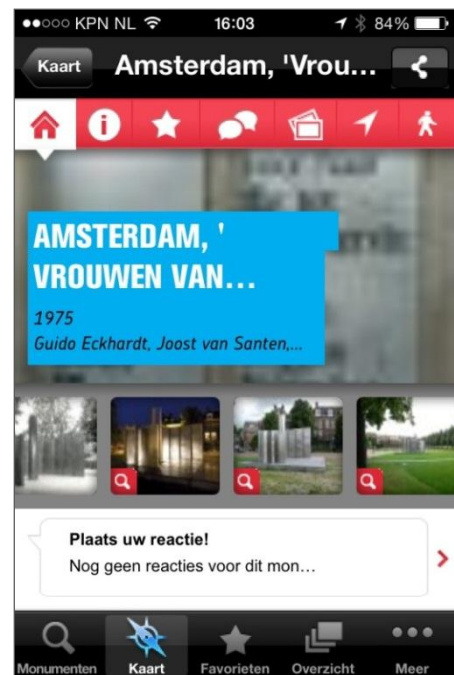
Since the year 2000, more attention has been given to these particular accents by erecting a plaque in remembrance of the male victims, and by inviting a former male prisoner and a former Jewish prisoner

to give speeches at the commemoration. However, there remains a desire for more ‘space’ to emphasize these accents, and this will continue to be a discussion within the Committee.

It is striking that although many appreciate the monument, almost nobody understands the symbolism, or the sound and light. Some are disturbed by the noise from what they call ‘that chimney’ that reminds them of the crematorium chimneys in the extermination camps.

There is a general consensus that the location of the monument is nice and important because it is such a prominent place right in the centre of the capital. However, with regard to future generations, it is considered essential to have an explanatory sign near the monument. It is important that ‘outsiders’, people passing by, know the background of Ravensbrück and the monument, and consequently pay more respect. As mentioned before, as of 2013, a memorial sign has been placed at the front of the monument and an application for a mobile phone providing information on war monuments is available.

The ‘social aspect’ of commemorating together at a particular day at a particular place (the monument) is important and will remain important in the future. This commemorating ‘triad’ of place, monument and ritual is valued by most participants. Not all elements of this ‘triad’ are equally appreciated: some value the being together more than the monument or the place. There is some concern that when the first generation has ‘disappeared’, the value of the yearly commemoration at the monument will decrease.



Application on war monuments for mobile phones

In 1936, the Swiss psychologist, philosopher, and writer Robert Musil (1880-1942), discussed the characteristics of monuments. According to Musil, one of the most salient characteristics is that monuments are ‘so conspicuously inconspicuous’.³⁷⁶ Every day you walk around them, you may use their pedestal as a haven or you may rest upon them, you may employ them as a compass or as a distance marker. But you never look at them, and in general you do not have the slightest idea whom or what they are supposed to represent. These remarks were made in a different era when monuments were,

³⁷⁶ MUSIL: *Posthumous Papers* 64.

maybe, sculptures, statues with a single layer of meaning, most often representing a woman, a man or referring to an important episode in history.

When passing by the monument *Vrouwen van Ravensbrück* at an ordinary day, it seems Musil's conclusions are accurate: people are resting on the platform, relaxing, having a drink, seemingly unaware of the meaning and background of this public piece of art.

And even at the time of the commemoration ceremony, life at the square continues: people play soccer, have a picnic on the lawn or stroll around the square, only few paying attention to the commemoration ceremony at the monument.



Life at the square goes on during the commemoration ceremony of 2013

With regard to the former prisoners and their relatives, we may not speak of an 'inconspicuous' monument. The striking form, sound, and light of the monument have a big impact on the significance of the monument. At the time of the commemoration ceremony, this 'power' of the monument is at a summit.

Chapter 4

Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands and the Jewish Monument Community

The monument takes a great place in my life; as a 'graveyard monument'. It makes all those people, and thus also my previous (before 1942) social life tangible. I think it is a blessing that their names will not be forgotten [...] My answers should be seen against the background of my loss of family and entire social background from before 1942. (John Blom, November 2011)

4.1 Introduction



Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands³⁷⁷

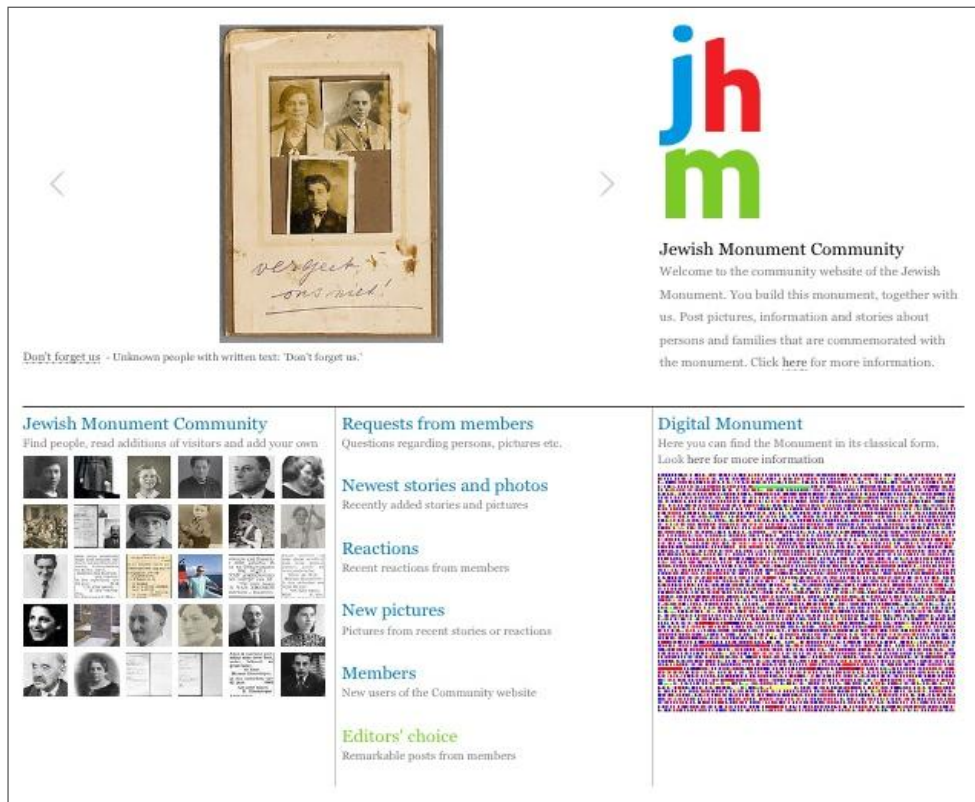
4.1.1 First impression of the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands

The Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands is at first sight a page on the internet. This page has been defined as the 'monument'. The monument went online in April 2005. This virtual monument has been dedicated to preserve the memory of 'all the men, women and children who were

³⁷⁷ www.joodsmonument.nl/, accessed June 26, 2013

persecuted as Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, and did not survive the Shoah.³⁷⁸ In total 104,000 names of victims are included in the monument. The home page (see the screenshot above) is intended as monument. This home page consists of a screen with thousands of little coloured bars which are grouped together in blocks. Each block represents a family and each little bar within a block represents a person who died during the Second World War.

4.1.2 First impression of the Jewish Monument Community



Jewish Monument Community³⁷⁹

As of September 2010, the Jewish Monument Community³⁸⁰ website has been linked to the website of the Digital Monument. The Community is an interactive website where so called 'users' or 'members' may contribute and exchange information about the persons remembered through the Digital Monument. The Community contains a copy of all pages of the Digital Monument but will be enlarged by

³⁷⁸ The description and details on the monument mentioned and discussed in this chapter are derived from: www.joodsmonument.nl 'Explanation', accessed June 23, 2013. I will continue to speak of the 'Digital Monument' when I refer to the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands.

³⁷⁹ www.communityjoodsmonument.nl/, accessed June 26, 2013

³⁸⁰ Hereafter I will speak of the 'Community' when I refer to the Jewish Monument Community.

contributions of members of the Community. These members may also add their profiles on their own personal pages. In July 2013, 6,001 user profiles had been registered at the Community website.³⁸¹

4.2 This case study

4.2.1 Focus and context

When the Digital Monument was launched in 2005, a new format of commemoration was presented, 60 years after the Second World War and the Shoah had ended. In this respect, the Digital Monument, and later on its Community, maybe considered ‘postponed’ within the context of this project. They both serve as an illustration of the impact of information and computer technology on commemoration practices.

Although interesting to study, I will not particularly focus on the differences between so called ‘online’ and ‘offline’ (commemoration) rituals.³⁸² In this case study the focus will be on the meaning of commemoration practices at the Digital Monument and the Community to people closely associated to the monument and the community. These issues will be explored within the context of cyberspace as a place of commemoration. In an early discussion, before the Digital Monument had even been launched, the Dutch emeritus professor of history, Hermann von der Dunk, labelled the monument as a ‘tasteless banality’.³⁸³ His statement was that a monument on the internet threatens to lose its dignity because it will be enclosed by advertisement, news and, maybe, pornography. In his view the essence of a monument should be its location at a permanent place where it may resist time. He considered the internet an unsuitable place for a monument honouring victims of the Shoah.

In his provoking article, Von der Dunk made a statement about the monument’s objective to put extensive and personal information on Dutch victims of the Shoah on the internet, apparently without their consent. He argued that, because the victims could not be asked, relatives should consent in publication of these data on the internet. This issue had been debated in court by one of the surviving relatives of the victims who considered publication of personal data on the Digital Monument a breach of privacy.³⁸⁴ The Dutch court rejected the claim and ruled that only surviving victims should consent in publication of their personal data on the Digital Monument.³⁸⁵

The opinion of Von der Dunk shows how back in 2004, when community networks like for instance Facebook, were still at the very beginning, people in the Netherlands were still doubtful about commemoration of Second World War victims by means of the internet and worried about issues like dignity

³⁸¹ Personal communication, A. Harel, Jewish Historical Museum, July 19, 2013.

³⁸² RADDE-ANTWEILER: ‘Rituals online’; LANGER, LÜDDECKENS, RADDE & SNOEK: ‘Transfer of ritual’.

³⁸³ ‘*Smakeloze banalisering*’ in: DUNK: ‘Een digitaal monument is een smakeloze banalisering’.

³⁸⁴ www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/1781884/2003/11/28/Het-digitaal-monument-voor-de-Joodse-gemeenschap.dhtml, accessed November 9, 2013.

³⁸⁵ As a consequence, only information on deceased victims of the Shoah is published on the Digital Monument and Community, www.joodsmonument.nl/page/552712#9, accessed July 23, 2013.

and privacy. Nowadays, a variety of websites exist which are devoted to the exercise of collective or individual memory. Examples are for instance individual web memorials to deceased persons, collective virtual war memorials,³⁸⁶ and collective web memorials in relation to disasters.³⁸⁷ The Australian scholar Paul Arthur studied how traditional physical memorials to war and other catastrophic events differ from online memorials and concludes that nowadays ‘online environments provide public spaces for expressing, sharing, and working through experiences of trauma and crisis.’³⁸⁸ These observations are confirmed by scholars from various disciplines, and it seems, from a worldwide perspective, that web-based memorializing practices have become accepted commemoration practices.³⁸⁹

More than a decade has passed since Von der Dunk made his statements. In the meantime, the Digital Monument has been launched and a Community has been linked to the monument. The Digital Monument presents an extensive database and archive, intended as commemoration of the Dutch Shoah victims. The Community has now over 6,000 registered user profiles.³⁹⁰ Apparently, these users have not been held back by issues of dignity or privacy.

4.2.2 Set-up of this case study

The Digital Monument has been discussed from the perspective of the debate raised by Von der Dunk and within the context of counter-monuments and virtual monuments.³⁹¹ In this case study I will not focus on the debate adjacent to the constitution of the monument, but I will focus on function and meaning to different groups of users and their engagement with monument and community.

I will start with a description of the Digital Monument and Community, their background and their objectives. The Digital Monument and Community will then be discussed within the context of the current debate on web-based memorializing practices. The empirical part comprises a (qualitative) exploration of practices, meaning, and opinion of the Digital Monument and Community among its users.

To explore the current status of (postponed) memorializing practices on the Shoah in the Netherlands, and to explore the status of web-based memorializing practices (are the Digital Monument and Community the only web-based practices or may other web-based projects be discerned?), an overview of recent projects will be presented.

³⁸⁶ For instance the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall – The Virtual Wall, www.virtualwall.org, accessed November 8, 2013. A so called ‘library’ of physical and online war memorials, honouring all who died in all wars since 1945 may be found at www.war-memorial.net/index.asp, accessed November 3, 2013.

³⁸⁷ For instance virtual memorials raised after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, these memorials have all been ‘archived’ in the September 11 Digital Archive, www.911digitalarchive.org/about/index.php, accessed November 7, 2013.

³⁸⁸ ARTHUR: ‘Trauma Online’.

³⁸⁹ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’; FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: ‘Web-based memorializing after September 11’; HASKINS: ‘Between archive and participation’; RECUBER: ‘The presumption of commemoration’; MARSCHALL: ‘The virtual memory landscape’.

³⁹⁰ Personal communication Anat Harel, editor Community Jewish Historical Museum, July 19, 2013.

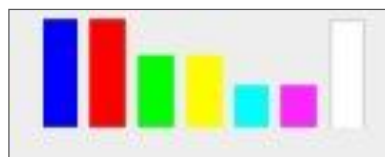
³⁹¹ C. POST: *Memorial culture in a virtual world*.

The case study will be rounded off with a discussion of the findings, and putting them into the context of the current debate on web-memorializing practices.

4.3 The Digital Monument: description of data

4.3.1 Representation of the victims

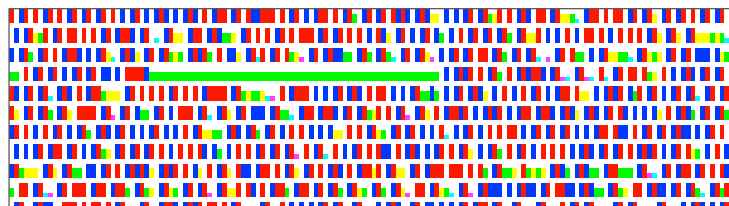
Included and commemorated in the Digital Monument are ‘All people who were persecuted as Jews under the Nazi occupation in the Netherlands and who perished during the war.’³⁹² Every victim is represented by a coloured bar.



Bars representing victims

The tall blue bar represents an adult male victim, and a tall red bar represents an adult female victim. The half-length bars represent the child victims: green bars represent boys in the age from six to 21 years, yellow bars represent girls aged six to 21. The shortest bars stand for the youngest victims: light blue bars represent boys under six and pink bars girls under six.

Family members who survived do not appear on the Digital Monument’s home page but only on the family pages as bars without colour and thus without information on gender or age.³⁹³



Enlarged screenshot of Digital Monument

The screenshot allows us a closer look at the Digital Monument. We may discern separate blocks, most of them made out of more than one bar, representing the victims within each family. This screenshot also shows one long green line, representing the Megadle Jethomiem Orphanage, located along the Amstel in Amsterdam. The number of boy orphans increased to 100 around the year 1940. In order to

³⁹² www.joodsmonument.nl/page/274281, tab ‘Explanation’, accessed June 26, 2013.

³⁹³ Due to privacy regulations data on survivors are excluded from appearance on the Digital Monument and Community, www.joodsmonument.nl/page/552712#9, accessed July 23, 2013.

circumvent deportation, the Nazis were horrified of contagious illnesses, their physician extended a case of scarlet fever as long as he could. None the less, all the boys from the orphanage and their caretakers were finally deported directly to Sobibor in March 1943 and did not return. Two boys managed to escape from the train.³⁹⁴

4.3.2 Different 'layers' of information

In order to create a full picture of the circumstances in which the Jewish people in the Netherlands lived at the beginning of the Second World War, as much information as possible was added at the Digital Monument. In order to present a clear picture, the available information at the monument has been organized in different 'layers':

- a first 'layer' is the personal page of each individual victim;
- a second 'layer' is the family page;
- a third 'layer' is the address page;
- a fourth 'layer' is filled with information on the inventories which was left behind by the families who were deported and did not return.

First 'layer': the personal page of Anne Frank

Annelies Marie Frank

Frankfurt am Main, 12 June 1929
Bergen-Belsen, March 1945
Reached the age of 15

Do you have extra information about Annelies Marie Frank?
[Add information in the Community »](#)



Frank and his family » ⓘ
Merwedeplein 37 II, Amsterdam »

Edith Frank-Holländer » ⓘ
Aken, 16 January 1900
Auschwitz, 6 January 1945
Spouse

Margot Betti Frank » ⓘ
Frankfurt am Main, 16 February 1926
Bergen-Belsen, March 1945
Daughter

Annelies Marie Frank
Frankfurt am Main, 12 June 1929
Bergen-Belsen, March 1945
Daughter

Rosalie Holländer-Stern » ⓘ
Bad Schwalbach, 25 December 1866
Amsterdam, 29 January 1942
Relative

[Husband has survived the war](#)

Annelies Marie Frank is better known as Anne Frank, the girl that kept a diary during her stay in the Achterhuis. Anne Frank died in March 1945 in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, a few days after her sister Margot had died. The exact day of her death is not known. Information on Anne Frank can be found at the site of the **Anne Frankhuis**.

This person is commemorated on several memorials among which a **memorial in the Anne Frankschool at Amsterdam** and a **memorial at the Merwedeplein at Amsterdam** and a **memorial at Vijfhuizen**. More information on these memorials can be found (in Dutch) on the website of the Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei.



enlarge image »
Anne Frank
© AFF Bazel, CH / AFS Amsterdam, NL

The personal page of Anne Frank in the Digital Monument³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/537470/en, accessed June 26, 2013.

³⁹⁵ www.joodsmonument.nl/person/510596/en, accessed June 26, 2013.

The personal page of Anne Frank, who wrote her diary while hiding in the Achterhuis from the Nazis, may serve as an example of the kind of information that is provided by means of the monument.

Her full name, Annelies Marie Frank, is listed as well as her place and date of birth; Frankfurt am Main, 12 June 1929. The information on the personal and the family pages as shown in the pictures, is retrieved from the so called 'register lists'. These are the lists with the names and addresses of the Jewish people, residents of the Netherlands, as defined and registered by the Nazis. These lists were generated by Dutch municipalities in compliance with a regulation which was issued by *Reichskommissar* A. Seys-Inquart on January 10, 1941.³⁹⁶ Other information on personal data was retrieved from *In Memoriam*, a book containing the names of 101,414 Jewish victims deported from the Netherlands and whose graves are unknown.³⁹⁷

In the middle column, more detailed information is given on Anne Frank, like for instance on her probable day of death. The exact date of her death is not known but it must have been a couple of days after her sister Margot died.

The fact that she became known as 'the girl that kept a diary during her stay in the Achterhuis' is mentioned as well as the fact that she has been commemorated by several monuments, like one in the Anne Frankschool in Amsterdam and a monument at the Merwedeplein, where she lived until the moment they had to go into hiding in the Achterhuis on the Prinsengracht. A monument in the city of Vijfhuizen is mentioned as well. This monument was raised in 1951 in remembrance of Jewish victims of the Shoah. At the wall of the monument the names of Jewish victims and their date of birth are mentioned. Anne, her sister Margot, and her mother Edith have been mentioned on this monument.

A link is provided with the website of the Anne Frankhuis, located at the site of the wartime hiding place, the Achterhuis at the Prinsengracht, www.annefrank.org. At this website more information can be retrieved on Anne Frank.

At the right column of the page, a picture of Anne is shown, as well as a request for 'additional information on Annelies Marie Frank'. It is stated that this information can be added in the Community of the Digital Monument. The details on this Community will be explained later on in this chapter.

Second 'layer': the Frank family page

In the left column of the page, the address, and a description of the family members living at the same address are given. When clicking on 'Frank and his family' the family page will appear.

³⁹⁶ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/274301, tab 'Explanation', accessed June 26, 2013.

³⁹⁷ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/274301, tab 'Explanation', accessed June 26, 2013. In 1995, *In Memoriam*/'Lezecher' was published, a book with the names of 103,000 victims of the Shoah.

Frank and his family



No inventory of household effects present

Do you have extra information about Frank and his family?
[Add information in the Community »](#)

Merwedeplein 37 II, Amsterdam »
 Situation in

Edith Frank-Holländer » 
 Aken, 16 January 1900
 Auschwitz, 6 January 1945
 Spouse

Margot Betti Frank » 
 Frankfurt am Main, 16 February 1926
 Bergen-Belsen, March 1945
 Daughter

Annelies Marie Frank » 
 Frankfurt am Main, 12 June 1929
 Bergen-Belsen, March 1945
 Daughter

Rosalie Holländer-Stern » 
 Bad Schwalbach, 25 December 1866
 Amsterdam, 29 January 1942
 Relative

Husband has survived the war

The Frank family fled from Frankfurt am Main to the Netherlands in 1933. The parents and two children, Margot and Annelies Marie, better known as Anne Frank, moved into a home on Merwedeplein in Amsterdam. During the war, the family was in hiding in the 'Achterhuis' on Prinsengracht. Anne kept a diary there, which was published in many languages after the war.

Addition of a visitor of the website

In addition, a Jokus file (number 18256) on this family is at the Amsterdam Municipal Archive. Access is subject to authorization from the Stichting Joods Maatschappelijk Werk.



enlarge image »
 Edith, Margot and Anne (on the left) in Frankfurt am Main, 1933
 ©AFF Bazel, CH / AFS Amsterdam, NL

Family page of the Frank family³⁹⁸

The family included three adult members and two children. Four of them did not survive the war, only father Otto Frank survived. Mother Edith Frank-Holländer is represented by the full length red bar, she died in Auschwitz on January 6, 1945. Her grandmother, Rosalie Holländer-Stern, had been living with them at the Merwedeplein 37 II in Amsterdam until she died of cancer in January 1942 as is explained on her own personal page which will be shown when clicking on her name. The two half-length yellow bars represent Anne and her sister Margot. Full names, as well as place and date of birth are also mentioned. Both, Anne and Margot, died in Bergen-Belsen in March, 1945.

The last sentence in the column explains that the 'husband has survived the war'. Because of the fact that the monument does not include information on people who survived, his name is not mentioned here, and an empty bar is shown, representing a family member who survived.

The bars representing Anne's mother and grandmother are red, the colour representing adult female victims. Anne's own bar, and the one of Margot are coloured yellow, the colour which represents girls aged six to 21.

The column in the middle indicates that there is no 'Inventory of household effects' available.

³⁹⁸ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/305996, accessed June 26, 2013.

Third 'layer': The Frank family address page

Clicking on the address Merwedeplein 37 II, will show the address page.



Address page of the Frank family³⁹⁹

This page shows that the neighbour families at number 36 *huis* (ground floor) and number 37 III (third floor) were also deported. The information on the family at number 37 III shows that there is a list of the inventory of their house present. The inventory is listed at a separate page in the monument.

Fourth 'layer': the inventory pages

When Jewish families were deported or when they went into hiding, they had to leave their household goods behind. The inventories of these households were confiscated by the Nazis who kept detailed records of them. It may be that these lists are not complete because valuables may have been stolen after they had been left behind. Also, many Jews gave valuables to other people to keep them safe, and return them after the war would have ended.

³⁹⁹ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/433761, accessed June 26, 2013.



Inventory list of the neighbours of the Frank family⁴⁰⁰

4.3.3 The Digital Monument and its objectives

When clicking on a separate bar on the home page of the Digital Monument, one is directed to the family to which the individual bar belongs. All families include individual members. Each member has an own personal page. In this respect, the life of every individual victim is commemorated. As explained, on this ‘personal page’, basic personal details are given, and, if possible, a reconstruction of the family relationships. The fundamental objective of the Digital Monument is to show the details and circumstances of each individual personal life and family circumstances around 1941 or 1942 in order to reconstruct the ‘picture’ of the Jewish community in the Netherlands on the eve of the Shoah. Information regarding thousands of individuals, like biographical information, photos, or information on the household belongings, has been added. With regard to most of the families, addresses are known and added to the monument. When you click on the address of a family, you will be taken to the address page of that family. On that same page, to the left, and to the right, Jewish families who lived close to this family are shown, and clicking on the address of a neighbour will bring you to the family page of the neighbour. Because addresses are added, visitors of the Digital Monument may take a virtual ‘walk’ through towns and streets.

At the homepage of the Digital Monument, one may also search on ‘city’. When a particular city is mentioned in the search box at the bottom of the page, all Jewish victims from that particular city are shown. If, for instance, Amsterdam is written in the search box, more than half of the web page will show coloured pixels, and the remaining part will turn grey, representing all Jewish residents from Amsterdam. The one and a half upper line of the home page lights up grey as well, representing other

⁴⁰⁰ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/289440, accessed June 26, 2013.

cities with a name that starts with an 'A', like for instance the city of Alkmaar. Victims are ordered alphabetically on their city of residency.

In this respect, the circumstances of each individual life are reconstructed. Because of the digital nature of the monument, there are almost unlimited possibilities of extending the monument. In that way the Digital Monument may 'grow into a unique presentation of Jewish life in the Netherlands in the 1930s and the early 1940s.'⁴⁰¹

Two key objectives are mentioned regarding the Digital Monument. The first objective is related to preserving the memory of Jewish people in the Netherlands who died during the Shoah.

The second objective relates to enabling survivors and others to learn more about the Dutch victims of the Shoah.⁴⁰² A number of 'derived' objectives are also mentioned. In the first place comes an educational objective which is to offer educational materials for different school types. A first project concerns the neighbourhood of the primary school that wishes to participate in the project. With the help of the Digital Monument, the teacher selects streets and addresses of Jewish people who lived in the neighbourhood of the school during the war, and who became victim of the Nazi persecution. The aim of the project is to develop and create an exposition of the families and their lives of Jewish neighbourhood victims of the school. In this way panels with information, pictures, and also present pictures of the house, taken by the students, are designed and created.

A second 'derived' objective is 'to stimulate research on the Jewish community in the Netherlands on the eve of the deportations' and a third 'derived' objective is to 'digitize and thus preserve historical sources'.⁴⁰³

Tens of thousands of Jews who lived in the Netherlands were killed in the Shoah. The memories of these people may often be vague or even nonexistent. This 'blank' inspired the idea of a digital monument which has almost no limits and makes it possible for this monument to continue to expand over the years with for example stories or pictures. In this way, the monument will never be 'finished'.

4.3.4 The initiative for the Digital Monument: its 'founding father'

The initiative for the monument was taken in 2001, by Professor Emeritus Isaac Lipschits.⁴⁰⁴ After his retirement from the University of Groningen, he started to research the restitution of legal rights of Jews after the Second World War. He published his findings in a book called *De kleine Sjoa. Joden in naoorlogs Nederland* (Little Shoah. Jews in the postwar Netherlands). During this project, he found many sources and the idea came up to create an overview which would create a greater insight into the lives of the Jews from the Netherlands who died during the Nazi regime. His objective was to sketch the

⁴⁰¹ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/274281, tab 'Explanation', accessed June 25, 2013.

⁴⁰² www.joodsmonument.nl/page/274285, tab 'Explanation', accessed June 25, 2013.

⁴⁰³ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/274285, tab 'Explanation', accessed June 25, 2013.

⁴⁰⁴ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/405673, tab 'Explanation', accessed June 25, 2013.

picture of the Jewish community in the Netherlands on the threshold of the deportations.⁴⁰⁵ This idea was the founding idea of the Digital Monument. His aim with the monument was to bring back in memory the names of about 104,000 Dutch Jewish victims of the Shoah lest they be forgotten. For that reason, he wanted to reconstruct, with regard to each individual victim, his or her circumstances at the eve of his or her deportation. Name, address, age, profession, and also family circumstances like where and how they lived, the number of rooms in their dwelling, furniture, books, musical instruments, jewellery, and so on, should be recorded and presented in the monument. He trusted, and expected that later on, these data would be completed with memories on these victims by relatives and friends. In order to reach these objectives, a digital format seemed to be the most appropriate 'form'. The Digital Monument, and later on also the Community, were designed by an Amsterdam company, Mediamatic.⁴⁰⁶ In between 2004 and 2007, Lipschits himself wrote more than 7,000 biographical texts and he himself took the first steps in 'building' the Digital Monument.

The further development of the Digital Monument was made possible through funding of the original project by the Dutch Verbond van Verzekeraars (Association of Insurers). This Digital Monument and its funding were part of an agreement made between the Verbond van Verzekeraars and representatives of the Jewish Community in the Netherlands, assembled in the Centraal Joods Overleg (CJO),⁴⁰⁷ on the settlement of insurance policies of Jewish victims of the Shoah.

A foundation has been established to monitor the implementation of the project.⁴⁰⁸ The project was first entrusted by the foundation to the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute of Social History) in Amsterdam. The Digital Monument went online in April, 2005 and responsibility for the monument was transferred to the Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historical Museum) in March, 2006. Nowadays, this museum is part of the Joods Cultureel Kwartier (Jewish Cultural Quarter) of Amsterdam which is a cooperation between several historical locations in the former Jewish neighbourhood of Amsterdam.⁴⁰⁹ Consequently, employees of the museum became assigned to the Digital Monument, and later on, also to the Community.⁴¹⁰ Together with volunteers they worked on the data of the victims, thus creating and constructing the Digital Monument.

4.4 The Jewish Monument Community

The objective of the Community is to create a place where 'past and present meet'.⁴¹¹ The opening phrase on the home page of the Community welcomes visitors, and invites them to post pictures,

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with Isaac Lipschits by HEYTING: 'Digitaal monument voor vervolgte joden in Nederland'.

⁴⁰⁶ Personal communication Ino Paap, Mediamatic, February 2013.

⁴⁰⁷ CJO is an organization with the objective 'to protect and promote the interests of the Jewish community with government and society': www.cjo.nl, accessed July 20, 2013.

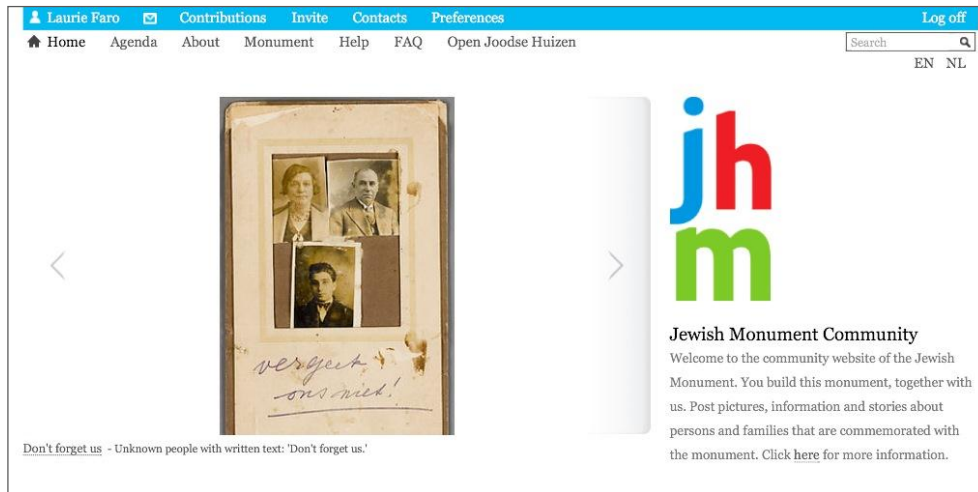
⁴⁰⁸ 'Foundation for the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands': www.joodsmonument.nl/page/405673, tab 'Explanation', accessed June 25, 2013.

⁴⁰⁹ www.joodscultureelkwartier.nl, accessed July 25, 2013.

⁴¹⁰ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/405673, tab 'Explanation', accessed June 25, 2013.

⁴¹¹ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/550562, accessed July 22, 2013.

information, and stories about persons and families commemorated through the Digital monument. In this way, the Digital Monument will be an ongoing effort, and a conjoined effort between the original ‘constructors’ and members of the Community.



Vergeet ons niet!: Don't forget us!⁴¹²

The objective of the Community is to allow users to post information and make contact with other Community users. Users who have become registered members may log in and participate actively in the Community through the following options:⁴¹³

- upload photos and articles;
- post calls for information;
- build a network of friends;
- indicate family relationships;
- create a profile;
- participate in discussions.

In this way, the ultimate goal ‘do not forget’, also stated as subtitle at the picture of the three unknown people on the homepage of the Community, should be reached. To illustrate the close relationship between Digital Monument and Community, Anne Frank’s personal page on the Community website will be taken as an example. In the left and the middle column, the information from the Digital Monument is listed. In the right column, there is a request and a possibility to add additional information on Anne Frank. Also other relevant information which was posted is shown, for example on January 11, 2010, the announcement is made of the death at the age of 100 of Miep Gies. Miep Gies was one of the employees of Otto Frank’s firm, who helped the family a lot when they were hiding in the Achterhuis.

⁴¹² www.communityjoodsmonument.nl, accessed June 26, 2013.

⁴¹³ www.communityjoodsmonument.nl/page/98/nl?lang=eng, accessed June 26, 2013.

She was the last person alive who stood nearby the family until their betrayal. Other information posted relates for example to a documentary on father Otto Frank, and a picture of Anne's tenth birthday party in 1939.


Person ⁵ (from the Jewish Monument)



Annelies Marie Frank

[Add a family member](#) [All actions](#)

Frankfurt am Main, 12 June 1929 – Bergen-Belsen, March 1945



Do you have extra information about Annelies Marie Frank?
[Add information »](#)
[Read more in the collection at JHM »](#)



PARENTS Otto Heinrich Frank,  Edith Frank-Holländer **SIBLINGS**  Margot Betti Frank **GRANDPARENTS** Rosalie Holländer-Stern

MEMBER OF Frank and his family

LIVED: Merwedeplein 37 II, Amsterdam

INTERESTED
 Serge ter Braake,  Eveline Wiegman, Jeroen Alex De Bruyn

[Print family](#)


Anne Frank - © APF Basel, CH / AFS Amsterdam, NL



Annelies Marie Frank is better known as Anne Frank, the girl that kept a diary during her stay in the Achterhuis.

Anne Frank died in March 1945 in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, a few days after her sister Margot had died. The exact day of her death is not known.


Information on Anne Frank can be found at the site of the [Anne Frankhuis](#).

This person is commemorated on several memorials among which a memorial in the Anne Frankschool at Amsterdam and a memorial at the Merwedeplein at Amsterdam and a memorial at Vijfhuizen. More information on these memorials can be found (in Dutch) on the website of the Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei.




STORIES
 Story:  Maarten-Jan Vos  1
Miep Gies overleden
 Na een kort ziekbed is gisteravond Miep Gies (100) overleden. Miep Gies was de laatste overlevende van de mensen die Anne Frank en...

Story
"Otto Frank, de vader van Anne"
 Documentaire "Holland Doc"



IMAGES



Personal page of Anne Frank on the Jewish Monument Community⁴¹⁴

4.5 Web-based memorializing

After this explanation about the Digital Monument and Community, which are two formats of web-based memorializing, I will now explore these 'modes' of memorializing as a context to the empirical part of this case study: the meaning of the Digital Monument and Community to users of the Community.

⁴¹⁴ www.communityjoodsmonument.nl/person/2470/en, accessed June 26, 2013.

The American scholars Foot, Warnick, and Schneider in their exploration of web-based memorializing practices after 9/11, define web-based memorializing as: ‘an emerging set of social practices mediated by computer networks, through which digital objects, structures and spaces of commemoration are produced.’⁴¹⁵

The British scholar in the interdisciplinary study of death and society, Tony Walter, categorized online memorializing in terms of ‘grief-specific’, and ‘non-grief-specific’ sites, and ‘intentional’ and ‘unintentional’ memorials.⁴¹⁶ The same line of argumentation is followed by Sofka⁴¹⁷ and Haverinen.⁴¹⁸ These categories demonstrate the extensive scope of virtual memorializing.

Examples of intentional memorializing in ‘grief-specific’ sites are web memorials, which will be explored more in depth in the next paragraph, but also memorial sites for ordinary people who died in specific historical circumstances, like in a (natural or manmade) disaster, or in times of war.⁴¹⁹

Intentional memorializing in ‘non-grief-specific’ sites takes place when for instance a deceased person is commemorated on Facebook, or when an announcement of death of a particular person is made online on, for example, the website of the employer of the deceased person.

We may speak of unintentional memorializing in ‘non-grief-specific’ sites when, after a person has died, his digital works ‘hang around’ in cyberspace for an indefinite time.

I will now continue to discuss the history and context of intentional memorializing in ‘grief-specific sites’ because, evidently, both Digital Monument and Community belong to this category of web memorializing practices as they both have the objective to remember the Dutch victims of the Shoah.

4.5.1 Intentional memorializing in ‘grief-specific’ sites: the first web memorials

Apparently, the first web memorials were established in the mid 1990s. The American web memorial *www.virtual-memorials.com* claims to be ‘the first online memorial website’.⁴²⁰ The site was founded in 1996 ‘on the belief that the Internet can provide a unique, and meaningful way to celebrate the life of those we have loved and lost’.⁴²¹

As of that time, web memorials have been the subject of extensive research by scholars from various disciplines, as will be discussed hereafter.

⁴¹⁵ FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: ‘Web-based memorializing after September 11’.

⁴¹⁶ WALTER, HOURIZI, MONCUR & PITSILLIDES: ‘Does the internet change how we die and mourn?’

⁴¹⁷ SOFKA: ‘Adolescents, technology, and the internet’.

⁴¹⁸ HAVERINEN: ‘Digitalization of death rituals’

⁴¹⁹ In the Netherlands, for instance, the victims (1836) of the 1953 flooding are remembered through physical monuments, but also by means of a digital monument named *1835 + 1*. The objective of this digital monument is to remember and honour the victims of the flooding, not only by name but also by pictures and stories, www.watersnoodmuseum.nl/NL/algemeen/nationaal-monument, accessed September 30, 2013; www.1953hetverhaal.nl, accessed September 30, 2013; www.deramp.nl, accessed September 30, 2013. In the United States, for instance, American soldiers who died in the Vietnam War are commemorated at their monument, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, but also at a virtual wall, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall – The Virtual Wall, www.virtualwall.org, accessed November 8, 2013.

⁴²⁰ www.virtual-memorials.com, accessed November 9, 2013.

⁴²¹ www.virtual-memorials.com/main.php?action=about, accessed November 9, 2013.

One of the early studies on the emerging phenomenon of death memorials and remembrance sites on the internet, was presented by the Swiss sociologist Hans Geser.⁴²² His focus was on the differences between ‘online’, and ‘offline’ commemoration. Geser states that:

‘[...] digitalization provides the foundation for a multimedia universe where all forms of private, semi-private and public expression become components of a unified sphere by being transferable and reproducible without relevant efforts or costs.’⁴²³

With respect to their ‘solid’ side, these virtual memorials represent ‘organic tombstones’, which are capable of growth and evolution and ever open for new inputs from persons wherever they are. The internet presents a ‘highly flexible, adaptive medium capable of keeping pace with subtle specificities, and changes of subjective thoughts and emotions.’⁴²⁴ As a result of this new form of expression, thoughts and emotions ‘hitherto hidden in the privacy of individual minds or informal interpersonal relations may be revealed’, wherever and whenever people feel the need to do so.⁴²⁵

According to Geser, one of the explanations of the ‘popularity’ might be that there seems to be a growing tendency to ‘dissociate the location of the mourning from the location of the physical body.’ Geser says that apparently, memorial sites on the internet may substitute physical graves by providing an artificial focus for remembrances and grief: ‘It is almost evident that the virtual memorial has to function as a substitute for the lacking physical tomb by providing an artificial focus for death-related communication.’⁴²⁶ Regarding the victims of the Shoah, there are no personalized places to go to for commemoration, like for instance graveyards. Visiting sites of the concentration camps has become more common nowadays, but is for many still a very emotional affair. In line with Geser, the Digital Monument and Community may be considered as a substitute to a physical grave, a personalized place to visit for commemoration practices.

Another aspect Geser mentions is the mobility of people. Because virtual memorials have no location in time and space, they will be very useful for commemoration practices of ‘highly mobile individuals who have left highly dispersed, and incoherent networks of kin, friends, and other acquaintances.’⁴²⁷ Users of the Digital Monument and Community may enter the websites wherever they are, and they seem to be dispersed all over the world, as appears from the user profiles on the Community.

In comparison with traditional commemoration ceremonies, commemoration at a virtual memorial may differ in many aspects: the commemoration practices are limited to practices, probably short in time and unrelated to other social involvements like, for instance, commemorating together with others. It may

⁴²² GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’.

⁴²³ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 6.

⁴²⁴ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 27.

⁴²⁵ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 6.

⁴²⁶ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 11.

⁴²⁷ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 12.

become a ‘small intermezzo, during surfing practices which are dedicated to other more salient purposes: e.g., gather information or gaming.’⁴²⁸ Geser finds it hard to imagine that a family or maybe a larger group of related people will assemble around a computer screen to commemorate all together at a memorial site.⁴²⁹ Geser argues that it would be likely for web memorials to develop and expand in the near future. He mentioned, back in 1998, the following arguments to sustain his opinion: There is a trend toward ‘more individualized life styles’ and ‘toward the substitution of professional services by informal “self-help” circles.’ Another argument Geser presents is that these web memorials offer functional facilities no other media or institutions can provide with regard to receptivity of all kind of responses and flexibility.⁴³⁰ If we consider the present day scope and status of web memorials, varying from individual to collective grief sites with regard to personal losses, war or disasters, no doubt Geser was right in his statement back in 1998. Geser defines the potential of the virtual memorial as follows:

‘It could be a significant cultural innovation because it has the potential of providing a focus for longer-term mourning: an ever accessible publishing channel for adding emotional expressions and for reworking the remembrances related to the deceased.’⁴³¹

In this respect, virtual memorial sites may reflect the fact that survivors have not ended their emotional relationship with the deceased even many years after the death of a person, as appears to be the case with relatives of the victims of the Shoah. The internet may provide means for expressing emotional processes which apparently existed at a mental level, but maybe could not be expressed through the conventional methods and media. He suggests that virtual memorial websites may be seen as an ‘outlet’ for expression, and that they may have a therapeutic significance.

Other scholars focused on the benefits and the therapeutic significance, as mentioned by Geser, of web memorials.⁴³² Pamela Roberts concludes that according to the results of her research, ‘creating and visiting web memorials can be beneficial for the bereaved.’⁴³³ She concludes that it could be that web memorials are more frequently visited than physical memorials, a fact which might be explained by the easy accessibility. They provide room for emotional expression, and personalization which is apparently different from attending funerals, and visiting ‘physical’ memorials. Many web memorials are personal tributes, written as stories or letters, to the deceased. They are a demonstration of continuing bonds and include efforts to make sure that the missed ones are not forgotten, and function as shared grieving by means of a sharing of stories, and the organization of a community in bereavement.⁴³⁴

⁴²⁸ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 20.

⁴²⁹ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 20.

⁴³⁰ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 9.

⁴³¹ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 14.

⁴³² ROBERTS & VIDAL: ‘Perpetual care in cyberspace’; ROBERTS: ‘From my space to our space’.

⁴³³ ROBERTS: ‘From my space to our space’ 4.

⁴³⁴ ROBERTS: ‘From my space to our space’.

In the Netherlands, research on web memorials seems to be limited.⁴³⁵ One of the recent studies is focused on the meaning of individual web memorials. Mirjam Klaassens, after analysis of 181 individual web memorials, concludes that: ‘Although, web memorials are meaningful to those who grieve, they do not replace traditional places of remembrance, but instead constitute an additional place.’⁴³⁶ Klaassens continues in concluding that apparently traditional places do not meet the needs of people who create web memorials, and that they are ‘looking for something more’.⁴³⁷ An explanation may be found in the nature of the death. Regarding unexpected deaths, it might be that relatives and next of kin were unprepared. According to Klaassens, web-based memorializing practices help the bereaved in: ‘[...] addressing unfinished business with the dead, to express their loss and to come to terms with the death of their loved one.’⁴³⁸

4.5.2 Intentional memorializing in ‘grief-specific’ sites: development and debate after 9/11

Since the 9/11 disaster took place in 2001, thousands of commemorative websites and online memorials have been launched in memory of these catastrophic events.⁴³⁹ Many of these sites memorialize individual victims, but when considered together, these web memorials may be seen as a form of collective commemoration.

A lot of academic research has been devoted to web memorials specifically related to 9/11, but also in general to the impact of information technology on collective memory and commemoration from a theoretical perspective. Sabine Marschall in her research on web memorializing practices in Southern Africa remarks:

‘[...] an extensive body of literature on web memorialisation and online spaces of commemoration contributes to the development of theoretical concepts to critically analyze and assess the significance of this new cultural practice of remembrance.’⁴⁴⁰

One of the examples in this respect is the conceptual framework developed by Foot, Warnick, and Schneider. After extensive research of literature and analysis of over 60 websites, produced in response to the events of September 11, seven ‘dimensions’ emerged by which ‘patterns in the characteristics of web-based memorializing on different sites can be considered.’⁴⁴¹ Foot *et al.* have demonstrated that web-based memorialization bears ‘a diverse array of characteristics, some of which are consistent with

⁴³⁵ KLAASSENS: ‘*Final places*’ 75.

⁴³⁶ KLAASSENS: ‘*Final places*’ 71.

⁴³⁷ KLAASSENS: ‘*Final places*’ 71.

⁴³⁸ KLAASSENS: ‘*Final places*’ 71.

⁴³⁹ www.911digitalarchive.org, accessed November 7, 2013.

⁴⁴⁰ MARSCHALL: ‘The virtual memory landscape’ 196.

⁴⁴¹ FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: ‘Web-based memorializing after September 11’ 88-91.

offline memorializing, and some of which are divergent.⁴⁴² Foot *et al.* distinguished the following seven dimensions:

- The object or focus of commemoration: does the memorializing focus on the loss or remembrance of something abstract, and/or general, and/or collective, or on something concrete, specific, and/or personal?
- Co-production: is the memorial produced by one individual or organization or is there any evidence of a ‘co productive process among actors who are independent organizationally from each other’?
- Voice: does the memorializing at the website reflect a single voice (opinion or meaning), or multiple voices?
- Immediacy: how immediately after the event was the memorial initiated?
- Fixity: does the memorial appear fixed or static, or is there evidence of evolution in its structure or content?
- Intended audience: who is the intended audience? They may include the deceased, those who knew the deceased personally, survivors of the trauma, others who were affected by the event, rescuers/heroes, or visitors to the memorial.
- Relational positioning of victims: does the person who commemorates refer to one or more of the victims as someone known personally by him/her, or as a generalized other, victims in the third person and impersonally?

When this set of characteristics is considered in relation to the Digital Monument and Community, the following observations can be made.

Focus

The ‘object or focus’ of the Digital Monument and Community is on honouring the lives of the Dutch victims of the Shoah by means of giving each victim a ‘face’ and a background, and to preserve the memory of ‘all the men, women and children who were persecuted as Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and did not survive the Shoah.’ Both Monument and Community offer possibilities of personal and collective commemoration. Considered as a whole, they are part of the collective memory of the Shoah.

Co-production

Foot, Warnick, and Schneider researched the characteristics of web-based memorializing practices in comparison with ‘offline’ memorializing and focused on the ‘producers’ of memory. With respect to ‘traditional’ monuments, designers may be regarded as the producers as they seek to frame the significance and meaning of the event for a general public. Foot *et al.* consider audiences as ‘spectators’ and

⁴⁴² FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: ‘Web-based memorializing after September 11’ 92.

‘co celebrants’, but not as ‘co producers of memory’.⁴⁴³ The characteristics of traditional and ‘offline’ public commemoration result out of authorship, purpose, form, and how audiences are positioned to respond, leaving little room for individuals to contribute their own personal memory. With regard to memorial websites, the individual input is most relevant and may be considered as a form of ‘co-production’ of memory.

This element of ‘co-production’ is also mentioned by Timothy Recuber in his study of the September 11 Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank.⁴⁴⁴ Digital archives and memory banks are online databases that allow users to upload images, music files, links, news items, and personal messages or stories to an archive that other users may browse or search.

The mission of this archive is to assess how history is being recorded, and preserved in the 21st century. The objective is to allow people to tell their stories, to make these stories available to a wide audience, to provide historical context for understanding those events. As stated on the website of the archive:

‘Our goal is to create a permanent record of the events of September 11, 2001. In the process, we hope to foster some positive legacies of those terrible events by allowing people to tell their stories, making those stories available to a wide audience, providing historical context for understanding those events and their consequences, and helping historians and archivists improve their practices based on the lessons we learn from this project.’

The September 11 Digital Archive is an example of a co-produced website ‘metamemorial’ and forms a repository of born-digital and digitized memorialization artifacts.⁴⁴⁵ The project formally ended in June, 2004, and although it is possible to continue to contribute to the Archive, the website is no longer updated.⁴⁴⁶

The element of ‘co-production’ is also present in the context of the Digital Monument and Community. By sharing their own personal remembrances, stories, pictures, or other digitalized objects which they consider relevant, on the Community, users contribute to the general remembrance of the Shoah.

Voice

The September 11 Digital Archive consequently offers a ‘panoramic view of the factitious cacophony of public expression’ which could never have been accommodated by a traditionally designed monument.⁴⁴⁷ Cultural geographer Kenneth Foote explained the difficulties of designing a memorial to commemorate 9/11: ‘This will be a very difficult task at the World Trade Center site because of the

⁴⁴³ FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: ‘Web-based memorializing after September 11’ 75.

⁴⁴⁴ RECUBER: ‘The presumption of commemoration’.

⁴⁴⁵ FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: ‘Web-based memorializing after September 11’ 93; RECUBER: ‘The presumption of commemoration’ 538.

⁴⁴⁶ www.911digitalarchive.org/about/index.php, accessed November 7, 2013.

⁴⁴⁷ HASKINS: ‘Between archive and participation’ 414.

magnitude of the losses, the diversity of the victims, and the fact that the entire nation feels it has a stake in the commemorative process.⁴⁴⁸ According to Ekaterina Haskins and following Foote's line of argumentation, '[...] a virtual space such as the one provided by the Archive can play a crucial role in forcing emotion and competing interpretations into the open', and the virtual memorial will have its own meaning and place apart from a physically tangible monument.⁴⁴⁹

With regard to the Digital Monument and Community, individuals may, in co-production, decide what they consider important to contribute, and as a result the memorial refrains from taking sides and imposing closure upon the audience's interpretation of the memory of the Shoah. Comparable to the September 11 Digital Archive, the Digital Monument and Community encourage users to submit their memories, thereby acknowledging that public memory may be seen as an evolving process.

Immediacy

The dimension of 'immediacy' refers to grassroots or vernacular commemoration which starts immediately after the loss and which has a spontaneous character.⁴⁵⁰ Many of the web-based memorializing practices that have been discussed in this paragraph were started immediately or soon after the loss or the event. In this respect, the Digital Monument and Community figure as an exception since they were launched decades after the Second World War ended.

Fixity

Foot, Warnick, and Schneider stress the flexibility of expression on web memorials. They 'provide opportunities for change, and development over time.' With regard to the dimension of 'fixity', this seems to be different with regard to traditional, physical monuments. In time, web memorials may become lasting records of a person's life.⁴⁵¹ Because of the 'openness' of the Digital Monument and Community, they may become 'living public memorials', just like the web memorials after 9/11. By means of the Community, all kind of memories may be contributed which may also be of interest to the general public.

Material monuments may be built to withstand the elements, however, there is a chance they may erode or be destroyed. On the other hand: 'Virtual memorials to endure on the web require the maintenance of a domain registration, and a server, regular backups on evolving storage media, and occasional migration between platforms.'⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ Foote: *Shadowed ground* 344.

⁴⁴⁹ Foote: *Shadowed ground* 343; HASKINS: 'Between archive and participation' 414.

⁴⁵⁰ MARGRY & SÁNCHEZ-CARRETERO: 'Rethinking memorialization'.

⁴⁵¹ FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: 'Web-based memorializing after September 11' 78.

⁴⁵² FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: 'Web-based memorializing after September 11' 79.

Intended audience and relational positioning

The ‘intended audience’ includes next of kin and other relatives of the victims, but also others who take an interest in the Shoah. Some of the users of the Digital Monument and Community are personally related to the victims, others may not have such a relational positioning. The differences in opinion and meaning between these separate groups of users will be explored in the empirical part of this case study.

4.5.3 In conclusion

Haskins made some interesting observations regarding the ‘blurring’ of boundaries in virtual memorializing practices:⁴⁵³

‘The boundaries between the official and the vernacular, the public and the private, the permanent and the evanescent will cease to matter, for all stories and images will be equally fit to represent and comment on the past.’⁴⁵⁴

These observations also seem to apply to the Digital Monument and Community: from a historical perspective, they may also contribute to the formation of public memory and have a function in the construction and interpretation of the Shoah and with regard to individual memory, they may ‘change the meaning(s) of memorializing for those who engage in it.’⁴⁵⁵ Evidently, these conclusions need further substantiation, which will be presented in the next paragraph.

4.6 The Digital Monument and Community: practices, opinion and meaning

4.6.1 Introduction of participants

In August, 2011, the Community editor sent out a request to all registered (active and non-active) user profiles of the Community if they would participate in a research on practices, meaning, and opinion of the Digital Monument and Community. After an inventory, the number of user-profiles appeared to be 2,503 in total. A positive response to participate was received from 90 members of the Community. These participants originate from all over the world, thereby indicating that the use of the Digital Monument and Community is not restricted to Dutch inhabitants. A questionnaire was drafted in both Dutch and English. Some of the participants answered the questionnaire in English. With regard to the analysis, their responses are not translated into Dutch as is done with citations from Dutch language responses, the original citations in Dutch are given in footnotes.

The research method was explorative and qualitative. The responses to the questionnaires will be interpreted in this way.

⁴⁵³ HASKINS: ‘Between archive and participation’.

⁴⁵⁴ HASKINS: ‘Between archive and participation’ 405.

⁴⁵⁵ FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: ‘Web-based memorializing after September 11’ 93.

Participants were asked to give their opinion on the following topics:

- practices on the Digital Monument and Community;
- commemoration;
- motives with regard to participation;
- meaning and opinion of the Digital Monument and Community.

Participants were asked to give their consent in confidential reporting of the results of the research. All of the 90 participants gave their consent and their responses were consequently included in analysis and reporting.

Participants were asked how they were ‘related’ to the Second World War. They could choose between the following options:

- I am a first generation relative;
- I am a second generation relative;
- I am a third generation relative;
- other, like for instance: historical interest, research, interest in family matters.

With regard to the analysis, the participants have been divided in four groups. The first three groups include persons with a family and relative involvement in the Shoah: they indicated that they were either first, second or third generation relatives.

To the ‘first generation’ participants belong participants who were born before or during the Second World War. Fifteen participants indicated that they belonged to this group.

The group of ‘second generation’ participants includes participants who were born during or after the Second World War. Forty six participants indicated that they were ‘second generation’ relatives.

The group of ‘third generation’ participants comprises family members of victims born in 1955 and later. Nine participants indicated that they belonged to this group.

The fourth and last group includes persons with no direct family involvement in the Shoah but who use the Digital Monument and Community with regard to other practices, like historical research regarding victims. Twenty participants indicated that they belonged to this group.

4.6.2 Interviews

In addition to the information retrieved by means of the questionnaires, I considered it relevant to speak in person to users of the Digital Monument and Community. For that reason I conducted interviews with three people whom I selected from the group of participants who agreed to fill out the questionnaire. The objective of these interviews was to illustrate appropriation and meaning of the Digital Monument and Community, and possibly, gather additional information which could not be retrieved from the questionnaires. The interviews were semi-structured with a focus on the topics of the questionnaires as explained above.

The following people were selected, because I thought they could provide me with relevant information regarding the objective of the questionnaires. They were asked and agreed to an interview:

- Mrs. Marja van Dijk (born in 1931), date of interview: November 12, 2011;
- Mr. John Blom (born in 1930), date of interview: November 29, 2011;
- Mrs. Martine Letterie (born in 1958), date of interview: November 24, 2011.

They were asked if they would agree to publication of the information resulting from the interviews and all gave their consent.

4.7 First generation participants

4.7.1 Practices and commemoration

The oldest participant in this group was, at the time of the research, 88 years old, the youngest participant was 71 years old.

Most of them had been active in ‘building’ the Digital Monument from the beginning around the year 2005, by providing the editors with information regarding the victims.

The group of first generation participants shows an irregular pattern of visiting and ‘using’ the Digital Monument and Community. Some of them were very busy, in the beginning even every day, when they wanted to have information on family members. They became less busy once they had found this information. Some of them visited the website several times a month, others mention that their visiting was very irregular. At the time of responding to the questionnaire, nobody visited the site once a day. One participant indicates that she was not active in the Community because she did not see ‘any use in writing to people I am not interested in, mainly because they know less than I do and they do have less data than I have.’⁴⁵⁶

Participants were asked to indicate what kind of practices they perform on the Community website.

Most of the participants indicate that they were looking for data on family members and were curious to find new information. In line with this, they would add pictures and information on relatives which they have in their possession.

The participants of this first generation group indicate that they visit the website alone, or with their husband or wife, and most participants of the first generation group do not think it is important to make contact with other users of the Community. Most of them never tried to contact another member of the Community.

When asked if they were ‘active’ on the Monument or Community on ‘special’ days, some of them answer positive and identified memorial days, days of birth or, if known, the anniversary of their family

⁴⁵⁶ ‘Ben niet actief in de Community: geen tijd om te corresponderen met allerlei mensen die mij niet interesseren, voornamelijk omdat ze minder weten dan ik en ook minder gegevens hebben’.

member's death. Some of them answer they would visit the Digital Monument and Community whenever they feel the need to do so: 'When I need to...' ⁴⁵⁷

When asked how they would call their practices, only a couple of them label their practices as 'commemoration'. Most of them name their practices 'the search for family members': 'I am now the only survivor of a whole generation. I myself have been in five camps. Now that I have found my whole family, there is not much more to look for. But I am grateful this monument exists.' ⁴⁵⁸ Another participant gave the following answer: 'From time to time I feel the need to look at data of next of kin and of other family members, and of little friends and relatives. I cannot really let them go after all that happened during the persecution.' ⁴⁵⁹ The aspect of coping with the effects of the Shoah is also mentioned by one participant and another one named the practices 'the fight against holocaust denial'.

These first generation participants indicate that they would also attend other Shoah commemoration ceremonies like the yearly Auschwitz Commemoration Ceremony or Yom Hashoah at the *Hollandsche Schouwburg* (Dutch Theatre) in Amsterdam. Others mention the nationwide ceremony in remembrance of all war victims on May 4. ⁴⁶⁰

Some of them were not able to attend public commemoration ceremonies because they had become too old, or because of the fact that there was no commemoration ceremony organized in their present hometown. One participant called it 'frightening' ⁴⁶¹ to attend public commemoration ceremonies and another participant never attended mass ceremonies. The practices on the Digital Monument and Community were not considered as a replacement of public commemoration ceremonies but they were more considered as an addition to 'traditional' commemoration ceremonies.

When asked why they were involved in the Digital Monument and Community, a variety of reasons is given, mainly related to keeping the memory of the family members alive:

'The monument is very important as commemoration, the names of the Dutch Jews who were murdered may not get lost – there are no graveyards... There and above, the day will come when we will not be here and therefore it is essential that we leave as much as possible direct knowledge behind.' ⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁷ 'Als ik er behoefte aan heb...'

⁴⁵⁸ 'Ik ben nu de enigste overlevende van een hele generatie. Was zelf in 5 verschillende kampen. Nu dat ik mijn hele familie gevonden heb heb ik niet veel meer te zoeken. Maar ik ben dankbaar dat dit monument bestaat.'

⁴⁵⁹ 'Van tijd tot tijd heb ik de behoefte om gegevens van omgekomen gezinsleden, familie, vriendjes en vriendinnetjes en bekenden te bekijken, ik kan ze niet echt loslaten na alles wat er gebeurd is tijdens de vervolging.'

⁴⁶⁰ Yom Hashoah falls on 26 Nisan in the Hebrew calendar which is the same date of the Warsaw ghetto uprising against the Nazis in 1943. This day of remembrance is organized by the Dutch Jewish community in the *Hollandsche Schouwburg*. The 'Dutch Theatre' acted as the place where Jews were rounded up before being deported to the camps, www.hollandscheschouwburg.nl/, accessed July 1, 2013.

⁴⁶¹ 'Beangstigend.'

⁴⁶² 'Het is zeer belangrijk als herdenking, de namen van vermoorde Nederlandse Joden mogen niet verloren gaan – er zijn geen graven... Bovendien komt er een dag dat wij er niet meer zijn en we moeten dus zoveel mogelijk van onze rechtstreekse kennis achter laten.'

Others also mention the fact that there are no graveyards to visit and pay respect to the victims. In some way, the Digital Monument and Community ‘act’ in this respect: ‘There are no tomb stones, in this way there is at least something.’⁴⁶³

4.7.2 Meaning and opinion

With regard to the relevance of the Digital Monument and Community, participants were asked about their emotions and the meaning of having a digital monument available at home.

One participant called the Digital Monument and Community ‘important, it is keeping me busy every day.’⁴⁶⁴ Another one mentioned that the ‘remembrance of the murdered ones should be kept alive.’⁴⁶⁵

The Digital Monument and Community elicits a mixture of emotions: participants are at the same time sad, but also happy to be able ‘to do something’. Sad, because seeing the enormous number of names of the victims all together at a ‘one page website monument’ is overwhelming and brings out feelings of great sadness and helplessness: ‘When I was first confronted with the information on the computer I was at first very upset, but slowly I am also getting very happy with all that has become known.’⁴⁶⁶ ‘I feel very sad about all that suffering and injustice,’⁴⁶⁷ at the other side, people are also ‘happy’ to do something, if only to keep the victims from being forgotten, or grateful because data about lost family numbers could be found.

Many advantages are mentioned with regard to the Digital Monument and Community, in particular regarding the search for information on their relatives and that they can do this anytime, at home or wherever they are, all over the world. They receive information that they otherwise might never have been able to gather. One participant calls this monument ‘Open to the world’, and an ongoing base of support regarding information on victims. Others consider it ‘very practical as a contributing source of information to the *In Memoriam* book.’⁴⁶⁸

Some consider it very easy to access the information, others doubts whether especially older people from their own generation will be able to benefit from the digital advantages of the Digital Monument and Community.

General opinion within this group of first generation participants may be summarized as follows: ‘It is very important for me to be able to commemorate and honour my family. People need information, even

⁴⁶³ ‘Er zijn geen grafstenen, op deze manier is er tenminste iets.’

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Belangrijk, houdt me dagelijks bezig.’

⁴⁶⁵ ‘Om de herinnering aan de vermoorden levend te houden.’

⁴⁶⁶ ‘Toen de inlichtingen op de computer kwamen was ik eerst erg overstuur, maar langzamerhand ben ik ook heel gelukkig met wat er bekend werd.’

⁴⁶⁷ ‘Verdrietig en een gevoel van machteloosheid bij zo onnoemelijk veel leed en onrecht.’

⁴⁶⁸ ‘Bijzonder praktisch als een aanvullende bron van informatie voor het *In Memoriam* boek...’

after all those years.⁴⁶⁹ Others call it a ‘fantastic’, ‘brilliant’, and ‘valuable’ initiative: ‘It is a very important and valuable monument. In fact it is a (digital) graveyard for most of them who went up in smoke.’⁴⁷⁰

The educational aspects are mentioned, in particular regarding young people because they will be able to see what has happened: ‘Many of them do not believe it.’⁴⁷¹

Although many participants are positive, some mention other aspects, like that they were contacted by people with whom they do not wish to be in contact with, or they do not see the advantages of the Community: ‘I consider the Digital Monument a brilliant idea. But I do not see the benefits of the Community function.’⁴⁷² Some are confronted with information they are not interested in.

One of the participants felt ‘excluded’, because as a survivor, he had been in hiding with a non-Jewish family, he is not mentioned: ‘Within the monument I stay anonymous and excluded.’⁴⁷³ This observation, although only one, is in contrast with the objections made by Von der Dunk in 2004, regarding privacy and seems to object the policy of the editors to publish only data on victims who died in the Shoah.⁴⁷⁴

Overall, the opinion on both the Digital Monument and Community in this first generation group is very positive. The opinion of the oldest participant to this research, 88 years old, was very positive: ‘An excellent site, keep up the good works [...] It is the greatest and best Dutch victim memorial seen yet.’

4.7.3 Results of the interviews

Within this group of first generation participants, two participants were invited for an interview. The interviews helped me to put the results of the questionnaires into a more personal perspective, because they allowed me to get more specific information on the background of the participant and the impact of the Digital Monument and Community on how they deal with their war time experiences.

I conducted interviews with Mr. John Blom and Mrs. Marja van Dijk. Their background and a report of the interviews will be presented hereafter.

Interview with Mr. John Blom

John Blom was born in 1930 as a son of a Jewish father and a Jewish mother. He had one older brother. The family lived in Amsterdam, where his parents owned a pastry shop. In June 1943, John and his

⁴⁶⁹ ‘Dat ik alsnog mijn familie kan herdenken en eren is voor mij heel belangrijk. Mensen hebben behoefte aan informatie, nog steeds na al die jaren.’

⁴⁷⁰ ‘Het is een zeer belangrijk en goed monument. In feite is het een (digitale) begraafplaats en dat voor mensen die voor het merendeel in rook zijn opgegaan.’

⁴⁷¹ ‘Velen geloven het niet.’

⁴⁷² ‘Ik vond het Digitaal Joods Monument een briljant idee. Maar ik zie het nut van de Community functie niet in.’

⁴⁷³ ‘Ik blijf in het monument anoniem en buitengesloten.’

⁴⁷⁴ VON DER DUNK: ‘Een digitaal monument is een smakeloze banalisering’ 38-39. Due to privacy regulations data on survivors are excluded from appearance on the Digital Monument and Community, www.joodsmonument.nl/page/552712#9, accessed July 23, 2013.

father were deported to the Hollandsche Schouwburg in Amsterdam. They learned that, at the end of the day, all children under the age of 14 would be brought to a day-care centre at the other side of the road. His father told him, if he could, to run away from the line of children and go to a non-Jewish employee of the bakery who would certainly help him. At the moment they said goodbye to each other John said: 'Goodbye dad, see you tomorrow', not realizing he would never see him again.⁴⁷⁵ John managed to escape and went into hiding during the rest of the war. His father was deported and killed, so were his mother and brother, and many family members and friends.

Directly after the war, John found it very difficult to talk about his grief: 'It was a time when the war was not much a topic of discussion. People were busy rebuilding the country and you were still young, it was not an issue. At the time, there were only two possibilities: "he is still there" or "he is gone". I have never thought they would return although I kept on hoping.'⁴⁷⁶ In the 1950s, it seemed as if the war had totally disappeared. According to John, the war 'returned' with the huge public discussion on the liberation of three war criminals (De drie van Breda) in the 1970s.

Around that time, he became ill with physical and emotional problems, which appeared to be related to his war time experiences and losses. In the 1990s, he started to put down his experiences in writing. An exposition in the Verzetsmuseum (Resistance Museum) in Amsterdam pushed him to continue writing. His book was published in 2008 and entitled *Nooit meer naar huis. Mijn ontsnapping uit de Hollandsche Schouwburg* ('Never going home again. My escape from the Dutch Theatre'). His motives in writing this book were 'to compose my thoughts on what happened, for my children and grandchildren.'⁴⁷⁷



John's book with the portrait of his father, Maurits Blom

⁴⁷⁵ BLOM: *Nooit meer naar huis* 33.

⁴⁷⁶ 'Direct na de oorlog werd er niet veel over de oorlog gesproken. Men was bezig met de wederopbouw van het land en je was nog jong, het was niet aan de orde. In die tijd waren er maar twee woorden: die is er nog of die is weg. Ik heb nooit gedacht dat ze nog terug zouden komen, wel bleef ik hopen.'

⁴⁷⁷ BLOM: *Nooit meer naar huis* 9.

Practices and commemoration

John started participating about two years after the start of the Digital Monument in 2007. He considers himself not actively participating in the Community, although he has contributed stories on his family. From time to time, John needs to have a look at the data on his family members, his friends, and people he knew, who were part of his social environment and who all disappeared in the Shoah: ‘I am not really able to let them go after all that has happened during the persecution.’⁴⁷⁸ One of the last chapters of his book is dedicated to all the people from the first 12 years of his life who formed his social environment, 57 in total. Altogether, only two people to whom he was close survived:

‘Together they were my social environment. I think it is important that their names are mentioned, because many of them disappeared nameless from history. The young people had no chance at all to manifest themselves in life. They are all gone.’⁴⁷⁹

Meaning and opinion

John thinks that the Digital Monument and Community function in a similar way; it is important that their names are mentioned and not forgotten and that is his reason for participation.

Although the monument evokes much emotion, John explains that it is now much better to handle:

‘I will never be able to understand, I sometimes have the feeling that I am made up of two parts: one healthy part and one part which can never be healed because it has been mutilated too much [...], but now the mutilated part has opened itself and is much better to cope with.’⁴⁸⁰

John has a high opinion on the relevance of the Digital Monument and Community:

‘I think the existence of the Monument is very important, although I am not very active in my conduct and acting. The monument takes a great place in my life; as a “graveyard monument”. It makes all those people, and thus also my previous (before 1942) social life tangible. I think it is a blessing that their names will not be forgotten [...] My answers should be seen against the background of my loss of family and entire social background from before 1942.’⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁸ ‘Ik kan ze niet echt loslaten, na alles wat er gebeurde tijdens de vervolging.’

⁴⁷⁹ ‘Met z’n allen vormden zij mijn sociale omgeving. Ik vind het belangrijk dat hun namen worden genoemd, want velen zijn naamloos uit de geschiedenis verdwenen. De jongeren kregen geen enkele kans zich in het leven te manifesteren. Ze zijn allemaal weg.’ BLOM: *Nooit meer naar huis* 97-102.

⁴⁸⁰ ‘Ik zal het nooit kunnen begrijpen, ik heb soms het gevoel dat ik uit twee delen besta; er is een deel dat normaal is en alles kan doen, en er is een deel dat zich niet laat herstellen, dat is te veel verminkt, maar nu is het verminkte deel open gegaan en is er beter mee om te gaan.’

⁴⁸¹ ‘Ik vind het zeer belangrijk dat het monument er is, maar praktisch gezien ben ik vrij passief in mijn houding en handelen. Het monument neemt een grote plaats in; bij wijze van een monument op een begraafplaats. Het maakt al die vermoorde mensen en dus ook mijn vroegere (voor 1942) sociale omgeving tastbaar. Ik vind het een weldaad dat hun namen niet vergeten worden [...] mijn antwoorden moeten gezien worden tegen de achtergrond van verlies van familie en hele sociale achtergrond van voor 1942.’

In conclusion

The Shoah changed the life of John Blom forever. Coping with the loss of, what he calls, his complete 'social environment' at the age of 12 has determined his life ever since. John Blom had never been able to discuss his emotions until the 1970s when, finally, there was room to speak about, and write down his wartime experiences. This seemed to help him in arranging his thoughts.

The Digital Monument and Community contributed to him personally in handling the 'mutilated part' of him. At last, he has, instead of a graveyard, a place to visit and to commemorate his lost family. Generally speaking, commemoration and the mentioning of the victims individually are important, because this is a way of honouring and preventing that they will disappear namelessly from history.

Interview with Mrs. Marja van Dijk

Marja van Dijk was born in 1931 from a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father. Her parents divorced when she was young, and her father got parental authority of her brother and sister, and herself. Her mother became a member of the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB, the Dutch National Socialist Movement, a political party which collaborated between 1931-1945 with the German occupiers).

Marja tells me that her mother went to work in Germany and that the children did not see her much. Her father had to go into hiding during the war, and Marja, her brother, and sister were taken care of by different families. The last time she saw her father was when he came to visit her secretly on her birthday: 'A goodbye forever on my eleventh birthday.'⁴⁸² After the war, she thought for a long time that he would return: 'But nobody showed up, he and his whole family perished [...] Years later, I found one cousin.'⁴⁸³ The children lived in different foster homes. They could only see their mother a couple of times a year and always under surveillance. They all had a difficult time: 'People would say that we should not cry, should not act childish... nobody would comfort us.'⁴⁸⁴

Practices and commemoration

After her own children had grown up and left the house, Marja started getting depressed:

'One night, I watched a play on Anne Frank on television and I started crying. They showed a telephone number you could call if you needed help, and I did. They advised me to contact Joods Maatschappelijk Werk⁴⁸⁵ which I did and they helped me a lot. They informed me about the Digital Monument and Community and that was how I started participating.'⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸² 'Een afscheid voor altijd op mijn elfde verjaardag.'

⁴⁸³ 'Maar er kwam niemand. Hij en zijn hele familie zijn omgekomen [...] Jaren later vond ik één nicht.'

⁴⁸⁴ 'Mensen zeiden dat we niet moesten huilen en ons niet aanstellen, niemand die ons troostte.'

⁴⁸⁵ Joods Maatschappelijk Werk is a Jewish welfare organisation.

⁴⁸⁶ 'Op een avond zag ik op de televisie een toneelstuk over Anne Frank en toen ben ik gaan huilen. Ze lieten een telefoonnummer zien dat je kon bellen als je hulp nodig had en dat heb ik toen gedaan. Ik werd door verwezen naar Joods Maatschappelijk Werk en zij hebben me heel erg geholpen. Zij maakten me ook attent op het Digitaal Monument en Community en zo ben ik gaan deelnemen.'

Marja started participating in the Digital Monument and Community at an early stage, when only the Digital Monument was online. Nowadays, only a couple of times a month she visits, alone, the website which takes her more than an hour each time. She looks for family members and submits new information. She also uses the website for commemoration practices.

Next to the aid of Joods Maatschappelijke Werk and her visits on the sites of the Digital Monument and Community, Marja tries to deal with her past with the aid of creative arts:

‘About 30 years ago, I started making sculptures, and people reacted that they evoked much emotion. Then I thought: Yes, I am not only acting with my hands, something is also happening in my head, I am looking for contact, love, affection, all aspects between human beings. I was always creating female figures. Probably this had to do with my mother and my war time experiences. I made hundreds of them and I sold them or gave them away, and time and time again, people told me how much affection they roused and then I thought: “I have to write it all down”, which I finally did.’⁴⁸⁷



Besides sculpturing, Marja started writing with the objective to record her own history for her children, but also to record the history of her father's family, which has almost completely disappeared in the Shoah. The book is not about historical facts, but about her own experiences, her own voyage through time. She felt that it was a commission which she had to fulfil. She finished the book on her eightieth birthday in the summer of 2011 and offered it to her children. At the time she was writing her book, she was also active on the website of the Digital Monument and Community.

‘Zadkine's sculpture always appealed to me, when you have that child time experience of losing your father and your mother, it obviously affects you and it comforts me to symbolize my loss in my sculpture.’⁴⁸⁸ [Marja van Dijk, November 2011]

⁴⁸⁷ ‘Ongeveer dertig jaar geleden ben ik begonnen met het maken van kleine beelden en ik hoorde van mensen dat er zoveel gevoel van uitging. Toen dacht ik: “Ja, ik doe het niet alleen met mijn handen, er gebeurt ook iets in mijn hoofd, ik zoek naar contact, liefde, genegenheid, alle aspecten tussen mensen.” Ik maakte altijd vrouwen figuren. Dit had waarschijnlijk te maken met mijn moeder en mijn oorlogsverleden. Ik maakte honderden beeldjes en verkocht ze of gaf ze weg en elke keer hoorde ik weer dat er zoveel van uitging en toen dacht ik: “Ik moet het allemaal opschrijven,” en dat heb ik uiteindelijk gedaan.’

⁴⁸⁸ ‘Het beeld van Zadkine heeft me altijd erg aangesproken, als je als kind je vader en je moeder verliest, hoe moet je dan verder... dat heeft me heel erg beïnvloed, ik dacht daar ga ik iets mee doen, en dat is natuurlijk wel heel mooi dat je iets wilt uitbeelden en dat je dat dan ook kunt. Het helpt me in zekere zin.’

She considers all her practices as acts of commemoration: ‘It is very important to me that I am finally able to commemorate my family members [...] It is important that their names are mentioned somewhere. It is a “must” that they have a name and a face. I am probably the only one left of the family who is able to do this.’⁴⁸⁹

The Digital Monument and Community presented Marja with the opportunity to commemorate and honour her father and his family at last: ‘I have not seen them dead, they just disappeared from your life and there was no possibility to bury them or to commemorate them. This goes on and on in your head and it had to come out... which happened. Now it has its own place and I notice that I am able to let it go.’⁴⁹⁰

Meaning and opinion

In order to deal with her experiences and in memory of her family who perished in the Shoah, Marja started participating in the Digital Monument and Community.

Her creative practices, but also her practices on the Digital Monument and Community, bring her relieve and help her in expressing her thoughts: ‘In the past I had the feeling that I could not speak about what happened, I could not let my emotions go, but now I have succeeded, with the help of my sculptures and my book.’⁴⁹¹

Marja values the Digital Monument very much. She finds the Community more problematic because she is less familiar, maybe because of her age, in using internet community websites. The Digital Monument enabled and stimulated her to a high degree in representing her life story in writing and in sculpture, thereby paying respect and commemorating the family members she lost in the Shoah: ‘It is all right now. I have reached my goal. I may let it rest now.’⁴⁹²

In conclusion

Just like John Blom, Marja van Dijk lost family members in the Shoah, which changed her life forever. After the war ended, there was also a long period when it was impossible to discuss her war time experiences. When she got older, the impact of the war seemed to become bigger and she looked for help. Creative expression and putting her life story in writing helped her in dealing with her emotions. The Digital Monument and Community are frequently used to commemorate her father and other family members. They just ‘disappeared’ from her life and before, there had never been a personal place to commemorate them. She feels that being able to commemorate them has helped her, together with the writing and sculpting, in coming to terms with her experiences.

⁴⁸⁹ ‘Het is heel belangrijk voor mij dat ik alsnog mijn familie kan herdenken.’ [...] Het is belangrijk dat hun namen ergens worden genoemd. Het is een ‘must’ dat ze een naam hebben en een gezicht. Ik ben waarschijnlijk de enige in de hele familie die dit nog kan doen.’

⁴⁹⁰ ‘Ik heb ze niet dood gezien, ze zijn zomaar uit je leven verdwenen en je hebt ze niet kunnen begraven, niet kunnen herdenken, en het speelt alsmáar in je hoofd... en het moest een uitweg hebben. Nu heeft het een plek gekregen en nu merk ik dat ik het losser ga laten.’

⁴⁹¹ ‘In het verleden had ik het gevoel dat ik niet kon praten over wat er gebeurd was. Maar met behulp van mijn beelden en mijn boek is het me dan toch gelukt.’

⁴⁹² ‘Het is nu goed. Ik heb mijn doel bereikt, ik hoef er niets meer mee.’

4.8 Second generation participants

4.8.1 Practices and commemoration

In this group, the oldest participant was 73 years old at the time of the research, and the youngest participant was 44 years old. Like in the group of first generation participants, in this group, many participants have been active right from the start of the Digital Monument. The start of the Community in 2010 was for many others an incentive to join.

These participants show an irregular pattern of ‘visiting’ and being busy on the Digital Monument and Community. Some visit the website several times a week or a month, others mention that their visiting was very irregular. Nobody visited the site once a day.

When asked what kind of practices they perform, a variety of answers has been given. Most of them look for information on family members or are hopeful to find ‘possible surviving relatives’.⁴⁹³ Many say that they are engaged in genealogy research of their family and ‘use’ the Digital Monument and Community in this respect. When information was found, they would add it to the Digital Monument and Community. Some state that they consider it important that their family has been written upon someplace: ‘It is important that they have been “described” someplace.’⁴⁹⁴

Within this group of participants, it seems to be very important to create a full picture of the entire family, including all the victims of the Shoah: ‘To repair families within extended relative and genealogical research.’⁴⁹⁵ Some of them publish the information in articles or books.

Or else they just look for information and reflect: ‘Just to explore and reflect on my roots.’⁴⁹⁶

Most of the participants indicate that they act alone when they were busy on the Digital Monument and Community. Some of them take action together with family relatives. A great deal of them consider it important to contact and share information with other participants.

When asked if they ‘visit’ the Digital Monument and Community on ‘special’ days, most of them reply that they don’t. Those who do, mention, for example, birthdays of parents or days with special family remembrances. Others mention the days of deportation of family members or the period around the month of May, the period of many national commemoration ceremonies.

One participant linked her own personal tragedy of the death of her only child to the wish to pass on history. Her little daughter was born and died in the month of January, and she uses this period to participate in the Digital Monument and Community: ‘Our daughter and only child was born and died

⁴⁹³ ‘Zoeken naar mogelijke nabestaanden.’

⁴⁹⁴ ‘Het is belangrijk dat zij ergens “beschreven” staan.’

⁴⁹⁵ ‘Het repareren van gezinnen binnen uitgebreid familieverband en stamboomonderzoek.’

⁴⁹⁶ ‘Gewoon om te zoeken en na te denken over mijn roots.’

at the beginning of January. To pass on history without having children yourself, makes that I want to do it in another way, by writing and share experiences online.⁴⁹⁷

Many of them consider their practices as acts of commemoration: 'By giving them a face, names are unreal, impersonal, I provide data and family relationships which I have read somewhere and in this way they will be less anonymous.'⁴⁹⁸ Others act as 'representatives', because there is nobody else left to do so, in commemoration: 'Commemoration of victims who have no relatives left.'⁴⁹⁹

Some name genealogical research also a mode of commemoration: 'With regard to genealogical research of family and others, but in my opinion this is also a way of commemoration.'⁵⁰⁰ They think that commemoration goes together with keeping alive the memories and protection against oblivion: 'Commemorate, but also keep the memories alive and protect them against oblivion.'⁵⁰¹

Others make a distinction, and state that their practices differ from commemoration: 'It is something that comes before commemoration: coming to terms.'⁵⁰² Some entitle their practices 'genealogical research' or a 'contribution to history' with the intention to present the complete picture of the Shoah.

Most of the participants in this second generation group of participants also attend other commemoration ceremonies. Members of the Community originate from all over the world and consequently a variety of ceremonies was mentioned, like the Yom Hashoah ceremony in Western Australia, ceremonies available in Northern California or ceremonies in Lathen, Germany, with regard to the Kristallnacht or concentration camp Estherwegen. Regarding the Dutch participants, the 4th of May is most frequently mentioned as date of commemoration; participants participated either in local ceremonies or in national ceremonies, for instance, in Amsterdam or in concentration camp Westerbork. The Yom Hashoah ceremony in the Hollandsche Schouwburg was also mentioned by some. Moments of commemoration within the Jewish religion and tradition were also mentioned: 'Eighteen direct family members have been murdered, I remember them at the provided moments within the Jewish religion, any other form will be too emotional.'⁵⁰³

Those who indicate that they do not participate in these ceremonies say that these ceremonies evoke too much emotion. They had developed their own practice of commemoration, mostly privately and at

⁴⁹⁷ 'Ons dochttertje en enig kind is begin januari geboren en overleden. Het willen doorgeven van de geschiedenis zonder het hebben van kinderen maakt dat ik het op een andere manier doe, door te schrijven en on line het een en ander te delen.'

⁴⁹⁸ 'Door ze een gezicht te geven, namen zijn onpersoonlijk, ik geef gegevens en familiebanden door die ik heb gelezen zodat ze minder anoniem zijn.'

⁴⁹⁹ 'Herdenken van slachtoffers die niemand meer hebben.'

⁵⁰⁰ 'Ook met betrekking tot genealogisch onderzoek familie en anderen maar dat is in mijn ogen ook een soort van herdenking.'

⁵⁰¹ 'Herdenken maar ook levend houden van de herinnering, beschermen tegen vergetelheid.'

⁵⁰² 'Dat wat vooraf gaat aan herdenken: een plaats geven.'

⁵⁰³ 'Achtien directe familieleden zijn vermoord, herinneren binnen de daarvoor geboden momenten in de Joodse religie, iedere andere vorm is te emotioneel.'

home: 'I commemorate in silence, in my own way and at my own time.'⁵⁰⁴ And: 'I commemorate them every day by producing a pedigree,'⁵⁰⁵ or: 'I prefer commemoration ceremonies on tv.'⁵⁰⁶

Some of them consider their practices on the Digital Monument and Community as a 'replacement' for attending public commemoration ceremonies: 'Many of the surviving relatives who do not have a bond with the traditional Jewish communities will find support on the Community.'⁵⁰⁷ But others don't: 'More an important addition.'⁵⁰⁸

A variety of reasons is given regarding the motives of participating in the Digital Monument and Community. Family related motives, like the search for family members, to find answers about their fate, and to contribute by means of adding information, seem to be the main reason for participation: 'My grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts, and uncles were murdered, I want to know more about them.'⁵⁰⁹ One of the participants is very outspoken: 'To know all about my family, how and when they were killed: MURDERED.'⁵¹⁰

It is also considered important to keep the memory alive of all those who disappeared in the Shoah: 'To keep the past alive, remind the Dutch of their past in contributing to the number of Jews killed, aided and abetted by the people,' and 'They may not be forgotten and as long as they are mentioned, they will not be forgotten.'⁵¹¹ This aspect of keeping the memory alive by providing information on the internet is mentioned by one participant as follows:

'Commemoration of my family members who are victims of the Shoah. To include family relationships, like a pedigree. To provide the deceased family members with a "face" by means of pictures and stories to ensure that they will never be forgotten and remain visible for others.'⁵¹²

Another participant is very explicit in his motives: 'To commemorate the murdered ones and to realize that they have a name and are more than just a number.'⁵¹³

Some participate because they still have good hopes that someday family members will be found: 'I like to keep the memory alive. If I have additional information, I like to submit it. And sometimes I have a

⁵⁰⁴ 'Ik herdenk in stilte, op mijn eigen manier en op mijn eigen momenten.'

⁵⁰⁵ 'Ik herdenk ze elke dag door een stamboom te maken.'

⁵⁰⁶ 'Ik verkies herdenkingen op tv.'

⁵⁰⁷ 'Velen van de nabestaanden die geen band hebben met de traditioneel levende Joodse gemeenschappen zullen steun vinden op de Community.'

⁵⁰⁸ 'Het is meer een belangrijke aanvulling.'

⁵⁰⁹ 'Mijn opa's, oma's, tantes en ooms zijn vermoord, ik wil meer over hen weten.'

⁵¹⁰ 'Om alles van mijn familie te weten te komen, hoe en wanneer ze zijn omgebracht: VERMOORD.'

⁵¹¹ 'Ze mogen niet vergeten worden en zolang men hen vernoemt, zolang zijn ze niet vergeten.'

⁵¹² 'Herdenken van mijn familieleden die slachtoffer zijn van de Sjoa. Het aanbrengen van familierelaties (soort van stamboom). De omgekomen familieleden door foto's en verhalen een "gezicht" te geven opdat ze nooit zullen worden vergeten en voor anderen zichtbaar zijn.'

⁵¹³ 'Om de vermoorden te herdenken en te beseffen dat ze een naam hebben en meer zijn dan een getal.'

look whether someone commented... you never know...'⁵¹⁴ One participant did indeed find an unknown of family member: 'Posthumous reunification: a previously unknown family member, born in 1941, was found.'⁵¹⁵

Another participant, who does not live in a typical Jewish setting, feels connected by means of the Community: 'In this way I feel connected to a collective event.'⁵¹⁶ This sense of being connected and the aspect of solidarity which is aroused by the Digital Monument and Community is also mentioned by another participant.

4.8.2 Meaning and opinion

Most of the participants value the Digital Monument and Community very highly. Some because the family pedigree could finally be completed by means of the information: 'Until five years ago, the family tree stopped at my father's mother.' Others because it offers them: 'A place of commemoration, of information, of coping, making tangible remembrances.'⁵¹⁷ Another participant phrased it as follows: 'It is one of the important places where I am involved in commemoration and research of Jewish victims.'⁵¹⁸ One participant mentions that both, Digital Monument and Community, add to the family feeling: 'It is part of the family feeling because nobody ever spoke about the family.'⁵¹⁹ Another participant is happy about the Digital Monument and Community, because a family member found her: 'I am glad that it exists: through the site a cousin managed to find me. All of a sudden I have family whom I did not know before.'⁵²⁰

Like with the first generation participants, both Digital Monument and Community bring out a mixture of emotions. Most mentioned were mixtures of being sad, 'happy', and angry at the same time.

Participants were sad because of the terrible loss: 'A terrible sadness of loss of warmth of grandparents [...]'⁵²¹ People are amazed and stupefied about all that happened but also 'glad' that they have this source available and someone may be provided with useful information.

There is not only anger about the terrible events, but also about today's sentiments towards the Jews: 'I feel anger about emerging anti-Jewish sentiments in our society.'⁵²² Another participant is more explicit: 'Sense of helplessness, my mother suffers, I suffer to think what humans do to each other, I have been robbed of family. Holland will not support it Jews.'

⁵¹⁴ 'Ik vind het fijn om de herinnering levend te houden. Als ik een aanvulling heb, zet ik die er graag bij. En soms kijk ik of iemand er iets bijgeschreven heeft... je weet maar nooit...'

⁵¹⁵ 'Postume hereniging: een in 1941 geboren familielid opgespoord waarvan bestaan niet bekend was.'

⁵¹⁶ 'Op deze manier heb ik wel het gevoel deel te nemen aan een groepsgebeuren.'

⁵¹⁷ 'Plaats van herdenking, van informatie, van verwerking, tastbaar maken van herinneringen.'

⁵¹⁸ 'Het is één van de belangrijke plaatsen waar ik me bezig houd met herdenking en onderzoek van Joodse slachtoffers.'

⁵¹⁹ 'Het vormt een onderdeel van het familiegevoel aangezien er over de familie nooit gepraat werd.'

⁵²⁰ 'Fijn dat het er is: via de site heeft een nicht mij gevonden. Plotseling heb ik familie die ik niet kende.'

⁵²¹ 'Verschrikkelijk verdriet van gemis van warmte van grootouders [...].'

⁵²² 'Ik ben boos over opkomende anti-joodse gevoelens in onze samenleving.'

The Digital Monument and Community also brings some sort of relief: ‘Comfort, instead of a tomb stone, this offers more: pictures and stories. It is important that someone remembers them.’⁵²³

One participant mentioned that she did not consider this a monument, more a database, but others said that although it is only about ‘letters and data’, it makes it all very real. For some, a visit to the Digital Monument and Community is helpful when they feel sad: ‘When I feel sad and visit the site, this offers me comfort.’⁵²⁴

The fact that it is ‘only’ a website, a database, put for some the emotions in perspective and some participants do not feel comforted when they visit the Digital Monument and Community: ‘No, it is not comforting. I myself was born after the war, I did not suffer myself. After each visit I realize the suffering of my parents and I understand why things happened as they happened.’⁵²⁵ Another participant says that: ‘It is with me every day, but when you see your murdered family members, it offers little comfort.’⁵²⁶ Or like another participant phrased it as follows: ‘Fine, I am second generation. My father still has nightmares of tanks rumbling down the road, so a website does not have much impact.’

A variety of advantages is mentioned, like the accessibility 24/7 and wherever on the world, or in the privacy of the own family place: they may now commemorate at their own time and place.

It is also considered an advantage that all victims are mentioned at the same place: ‘A permanent history of man’s inhumanity.’

It is considered the best way to reach as many people as possible and offer them a picture of the victims. The Digital Monument and Community are considered valuable because it is ‘never finished’, and therefore it is ‘very much a living monument’.

One participant mentions, that especially with regard to the younger generations, the Digital Monument and Community are very valuable: ‘My younger brothers and sisters did not dare to become involved. Now that our mother has died three years ago, there is much more openness and curiosity about what happened, I think.’⁵²⁷

Although, some were disturbed by mistakes and wondered if all the information on the Digital Monument and Community is correct and adjusted when needed, overall the opinion on the Digital Monument and Community was very positive: ‘*Kol hakavod* (well done) to initiators and performers’ and ‘It’s ok.’⁵²⁸ The interface between Digital Monument and Community is not always understood: ‘confusing’, as one participant said.

⁵²³ ‘Troostend, in plaats van een grafsteen, eigenlijk meer: foto’s en verhalen, belangrijk dat iemand ze herdenkt.’

⁵²⁴ ‘Als ik mij verdrietig voel en op de site ben dan is dat een troost voor mij.’

⁵²⁵ ‘Nee, niet troostend, ben van na de oorlog, heb zelf niets aan den lijve ondervonden, het leed van mijn ouders wordt me na elk bezoek weer heel duidelijk en ik begrijp waarom bepaalde zaken gelopen zijn zoals ze gelopen zijn.’

⁵²⁶ ‘Het is elke dag bij me maar als je je vermoorde familieleden ziet geeft dat weinig troost.’

⁵²⁷ ‘Mijn jongere broers en zussen durfden er niet mee bezig te zijn, nu onze moeder drie jaar geleden gestorven is, is er meer openheid en nieuwsgierigheid is mijn gevoel.’

⁵²⁸ ‘*Kol hakavod* voor bedenkers en uitvoerders.’

More than one participant called it a ‘great initiative’, another one declared Monument and Community ‘necessary’ and a ‘valuable contribution to already existing monuments and commemoration ceremonies.’ It is also considered a good initiative from different perspectives: ‘Both with regard to researchers and to victims it can be a valuable contribution.’⁵²⁹

One participant called the Digital Monument ‘essential’, the Community is an ‘accessory’ matter.

The design of the Digital Monument is also praised: ‘The most beautiful monument possible, most of all because the pixels clarify the enormous number of victims.’⁵³⁰

Overall, the opinion on the Digital monument and Community is positive within this group of second generation participants.

4.9 Third generation participants

4.9.1 Practices and commemoration

In this group of participants, the oldest person was 56 years old at the time of participating in the research, and the youngest one was 32 years old. Most of them indicate that they had family members who had become victim of the Shoah, that they have a special interest and are inquiring into family affairs. Some of them started participating around the start of the Digital Monument, others later on. Two of them started in 2010, the year in which the Community was implemented. They vary on their opinion whether relating to others through the website is important.

Participants in this group show an irregular pattern of visiting and participating in the Digital Monument and Community: some of them mention a couple of times a month, others a couple of times a year. Daily or weekly visits are not mentioned within this group of third generation participants. Most of the visits were shorter than one hour.

The practices most cited relate to the search for family members and completion of the Digital Monument and Community with data whenever possible. All of them act alone when visiting the site.

When asked whether they participate in the Digital Monument and Community on ‘special days’, one of the participants mentioned January 31: ‘The day on which grandfather tried to escape from Camp Giditz and was killed, and also March 5, the day father died: he was not able to understand the information about father in time, the message from Yad Vashem was late.’⁵³¹

A number of participants in this group interpret their practices as ‘commemoration’, while an equal number does not.

⁵²⁹ ‘Goed initiatief vanuit verschillend perspectief zowel voor onderzoekers als voor slachtoffers kan het monument een waardevolle bijdrage zijn.’

⁵³⁰ ‘Het mooiste monument denkbaar, helemaal nu door de pixels duidelijk wordt hoe talrijk de slachtoffers zijn.’

⁵³¹ ‘31 januari dag dat opa uitbrak uit Kamp Giditz en omkwam, ook 5 maart sterfdag vader: heeft de berichten over vader niet meer kunnen begrijpen, bericht Yad Vashem kwam te laat.’

The attendance of public commemoration ceremonies is also equally divided: some attended those ceremonies, others did not for various reasons. Either because they live abroad, or because they prefer to commemorate ‘in silence and alone without distraction.’⁵³² One of the participants mentions that she has ‘fear of gatherings, no matter in what form...’⁵³³

The practices on the Digital Monument and Community do not influence their attendance of other public commemoration ceremonies.

Many different reasons are cited as motive of participation in the Digital Monument and Community. Commemoration by means of ‘not forgetting’ is often mentioned: ‘lest we should forget.’⁵³⁴

It is considered important that the site continues to exist and that the correct data are included. The aspect of family history is frequently mentioned: ‘Because it’s important personally, historically to contribute to the memory of my family and its history, and it gives me a way of connecting to my family history.’ Another participant mentions that: ‘My great-grandmother died in Bergen-Belsen after some time in Dachau. Some of my roots can be Jewish. I am shocked with the terror in WW2 [...]’

4.9.2 Meaning and opinion

One of the participants phrases the relevance of the Digital Monument and Community as follows: ‘It is like a permanent, sad given fact, always at my disposal when I want to visit, anytime and anywhere.’⁵³⁵

Another participant calls the site a ‘place for commemoration’.⁵³⁶

Others have not yet defined the importance of the Digital Monument and Community. One participant phrases his opinion as follows: ‘[...] I think that still a lot needs to be done.’⁵³⁷

Also in this group, the Digital Monument and Community evoke a variety of emotions. In the first place comes sadness: ‘Sad, very sad’ and ‘great sadness and sorrow’. Others mention a mixture of emotions:

‘In particular intense sad, but on the other hand it gives me a good feeling as if I can mourn instead of my parents who pushed aside everything. It is the harm that I have seen with my parents, which resurfaces and it is as if I put this sorrow at the right place at the monument.’⁵³⁸

As another participant phrases it as follows: ‘It offers some comfort that the site is dedicated to remembrance whilst being of great sadness and sorrow.’

⁵³² ‘Ik doe dit liever in stilte en alleen zonder afleiding.’

⁵³³ ‘Ben altijd bang voor bijeenkomsten in welke vorm dan ook...’

⁵³⁴ ‘Opdat we niet vergeten.’

⁵³⁵ ‘Als een vast, triest gegeven, altijd beschikbaar als ik het wil bezoeken op welk tijdstip en waar dan ook.’

⁵³⁶ ‘Plaats om te herdenken.’

⁵³⁷ ‘[...] Ik denk dat er nog veel aan gedaan moet worden.’

⁵³⁸ ‘Vooral intens verdrietig, maar het geeft toch een goed gevoel alsof ik het rouwen voor mijn ouders doe die alles wegdrukten. Het is het leed dat ik bij mijn ouders heb gezien, dat bovenkomt en alsof ik dat leed een plaats geef op het monument.’

A next participant has proud feelings about her grandfather who, unsuccessfully, tried to escape from his imprisonment: 'It makes me sad because of the loss, but I am also taken by proud feelings. You do not often hear about attempts to escape [...]'⁵³⁹

One participant says: 'It makes me sad. It reminds me of the dark sides people may have and that a continuing awareness is necessary because it is obvious what the consequences may be.'⁵⁴⁰

Another participant considers it difficult to explain his feelings: 'Difficult to describe, but mainly glad to be able to do something.'⁵⁴¹

One participant indicates (without further explication) that emotions were not applicable regarding his practices on the Digital Monument and Community.

Many advantages are mentioned regarding the accessibility and the amount of information which is provided, and which may be used in different manners like education about Nazi history and family history: 'The Jewish monument offers an enormous source of information and may function as a method of showing what the Nazis have done.'⁵⁴² As another participant says: 'It enables new generations to connect with history and their family, in a way hitherto unavailable.'

Being an internet site, another advantage mentioned is protection against vandalism.

Most participants have a high opinion of the Digital Monument and Community. As one participant says: 'I have a very high opinion of those responsible for developing and maintaining the site, it is culturally important, a great service to the community and historically important,' and: 'A necessity, or rather: it was about time.'⁵⁴³ Another participant mentions the relevance of the Digital Monument and Community regarding the present and future generation.

With regard to the Community of the Digital Monument, one participant holds the opinion that: 'A lot needs to be done before it can really function as a social medium.'⁵⁴⁴ He did not clarify his answer, but referred in this respect to the methodology of Facebook and his advice was to use and implement similar systems.

4.10 Other participants

4.10.1 Practices and commemoration

People who participate in the Digital Monument and Community for other reasons than direct family related matters, were included in the fourth group of participants.

⁵³⁹ 'Ik word er verdrietig van vanwege het gemis, maar ook een gevoel van trots overvalt me. Je hoort niet vaak over uitbraakpogingen [...].'

⁵⁴⁰ 'Ik word er stil van. Het blijft me eraan herinneren welke donkere kanten mensen hebben en dat je daar dus voor op moet blijven passen, want je ziet wat voor een gevolgen het kan hebben.'

⁵⁴¹ 'Moeilijk te omschrijven, toch vooral blij iets te kunnen doen.'

⁵⁴² 'Het Joods monument is een enorme bron van informatie en kan als middel functioneren om te laten zien wat de Nazi's hebben gedaan.'

⁵⁴³ 'Nodig, of liever: Het werd tijd.'

⁵⁴⁴ 'Er moet nog veel aan gedaan worden eer het daadwerkelijk als een sociaal netwerk kan gaan functioneren.'

Strictly spoken, this group falls outside the direct scope of this research project. To bring back to memory: the central issue in this project is the meaning of postponed monuments to people with a direct connection with monuments because they, or their family members, suffered a loss related to the objective of the monument. Although participants within this fourth group may not have such a close relationship to the Digital Monument and Community, their answers provide valuable insights into the meaning of the monument to people with maybe more ‘distance’ to the Shoah. In particular with regard to practices, commemoration, and emotions evoked, the results may offer valuable information regarding the scope of the Digital Monument and Community to people who do not have Jewish roots or have family members who became victim to the Shoah.

The oldest participant in this group was at the time of the research 83 years old and the youngest one was 36 years old.

Most of the participants started in or after 2008 with their practices. Some of them indicate that they were active several times a week or a month. Within this group, more than one participant was more than an hour in succession busy with practices on the site. Most of the practices within this group of participants, relate to (professional) research about victims or events. Some of them use the site to look for information, others contribute information they acquired elsewhere.

One of the participants mentions that he is in particular interested in the Jewish people who used to live in his house before they were deported. Another one mentions that he is interested in the Jewish people who used to live in his street. Most of them looked for information which they would then utilize for a particular purpose, like for instance a book or an educational project.

Within this group, most of the participants think it is important to connect to other participants on the site.

Their practices do not take place on particular days of commemoration, although one of the participants mentions that within the month of May, when the national ceremonies take place, he was more active than in other months.

One participant considers his practices as an ‘impressive way of commemoration’, and another participant considers his practices as: ‘Commemoration but also as historical research. Regarding all the data we collect, it becomes clearer what has happened. It is also important that those who cannot speak for themselves anymore are given a voice, they have been here and they may not be forgotten.’⁵⁴⁵ Another participant says that: ‘Not so much commemoration, but as long as a name remains known, this may be considered as a type of commemoration.’⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁵ ‘Ik zie het als herdenken maar ook als geschiedschrijving. Met alle data die we zo verzamelen is het nog duidelijker wat er is gebeurd. Ook is het belangrijk dat zij die niet meer voor zichzelf kunnen spreken een stem hebben, ze zijn er geweest en ze mogen niet worden vergeten.’

⁵⁴⁶ ‘Niet zozeer herdenken maar zolang een naam bekend blijft is dit al een vorm van herdenking.’

One participant mentions that historical research acts like a mirror of the future and that: '[...] to propagate Shoah is a continuing process, to warn people about the dangers.'⁵⁴⁷

Most of the participants also participate in other commemoration ceremonies, either national ceremonies or locally organized ceremonies.

4.10.2 Meaning and opinion

The motives for participating are mostly related to historical interest and research.

The Digital Monument and Community are valued by this group of participants, because of the vast amount of data and as a source for their research: 'A treasury', as one participant said. 'In my life as a researcher, this is an irreplaceable source,' according to another participant.⁵⁴⁸

Most of the participants consider it very relevant that they contribute to the Digital Monument and Community information that they have found in relation to their research. The site as a means of sharing knowledge is mentioned by several participants:

'[...] I want to complete the information on the victims as to address many who will read the information. So that as many people/generations as possible realized which atrocities took place. That families with young children, like my own family, have been murdered for nothing. To try and place yourself in the place of the victims and imagine how they stood in the middle of life.'

One participant says: 'It contributes to my historical interest and approaches the horrors of the Shoah, makes those horrors more visible.'⁵⁴⁹

One participant lives in the Maastrichtsestraat in the Dutch town of Scheveningen. When he was organizing a party with all the families living in the same street, older residents were asked to tell about the history of the street, and then it appeared that back in 1942, Jewish families had been living in the Maastrichtsestraat who were deported and did not return. Many present residents had never heard these stories and this was a shocking experience. Research was started at the Digital Monument and Community, and it turned out that the deportation concerned 16 families, 52 men, women, and children. The families in the street decided to erect a 'living' monument by means of a site on the internet: *www.deportatievanzestienjoodsefamiliesstraat.nl*. The information they found was put on this internet site. One of the residents started to write small 'portraits' of the families who were deported, and present residents were asked to leave these portraits in the residences in order to keep them connected with the premises, lest the Jewish family be forgotten.

⁵⁴⁷ '[...] Het uitdragen van Shoah is een continu proces, mensen blijven wijzen op de gevaren.'

⁵⁴⁸ 'In mijn leven als onderzoeker is het een onvervangbare bron.'

⁵⁴⁹ 'Voegt iets toe aan mijn historische interesse en laat de verschrikkingen van de Shoah dichterbij komen, geeft die meer een gezicht.'

Another participant discovered that the deportation of the Jews had been very close and that all names could be found at the Digital Monument and Community, which made everything very personal and very emotional. Especially when one discovers that the apartment he is occupying at the moment, had been owned and occupied by Jewish families, deported and not returned in the Shoah.

This group of participants concerns people who are first and foremost ‘working’ on, and with the data at the site. However, just like within the other groups of participants, many emotions are evoked. Some participants mention that they experience a mixture of emotions like ‘sad’, ‘happy’ because they are ‘able to do something’ and ‘angry’:

“‘Happy’ that I may contribute to return people their identity. I am always astonished. People have been horribly treated, people can be so senseless to commit mass murder. The ages of the children who were killed... yes, it all makes you sad. But it makes you especially angry when I notice how people of my generation discriminate others, take liberty, sometimes kill because of their descent. It frightens me, that we will ever make the same mistakes. I am surprised that worldwide politics and all civilians learn so little from their history.”⁵⁵⁰

One of the participants says: ‘It still makes me speechless. All those stories about personal suffering. I am hardly able to grasp the numbers which have now gotten a name and face.’⁵⁵¹

Another participant says that working on the site makes him so sad that he finds it difficult to work more than an hour in succession because of the emotions. Another one said: ‘Again and again: inconsolable,’⁵⁵² and: ‘The enormous amount of individual experiences and individual sorrow oppresses time and time again.’⁵⁵³ One participant is hindered by the data provided by the site: ‘I am often struck by an enormous depressiveness. The enormous amount of names, the ages, the stories which are behind the sometimes brief facts, impede research.’⁵⁵⁴

Some also experience an emotion of happiness. As one participant phrased it: ‘It helps also, because the names of all those people will not be forgotten.’⁵⁵⁵

Some mention the fact that they were able to make a contribution:

⁵⁵⁰ “‘Blij’ dat ik een bijdrage kan leveren om mensen hun identiteit terug te geven. Altijd weer stom verbaasd. Hoe mensen zo verschrikkelijk zijn behandeld, hoe gevoelloos mensen kunnen zijn om mensen (zo massaal) te vermoorden. De leeftijden van de kinderen die zijn omgekomen... ja dat alles maakt je ook verdrietig. Het maakt me vooral boos, als ik zie hoe mensen van mijn generatie anderen discrimineren, vrijheid ontnemen, soms vermoorden vanwege hun afkomst. Ik word daar bang van, dat we ooit weer soortgelijke fouten maken. Verbaasd dat de wereldwijde politiek en alle burgers zo weinig leren van hun geschiedenis.’

⁵⁵¹ ‘Ik word er nog steeds stil van, de verhalen over het persoonlijke leed dat deze bevolkingsgroep is aangedaan. De nauwelijks te bevatten aantallen hebben nu een naam en een gezocht gekregen.’

⁵⁵² ‘Keer op keer: ontroostbaar.’

⁵⁵³ ‘De enorme hoeveelheid aan individuele belevenissen en individueel leed blijft keer op keer beklemmen.’

⁵⁵⁴ ‘Ik word vaak bevangen door een enorme zwaarmoedigheid. De enorme hoeveelheid namen, de leeftijden, de verhalen die achter de soms summieri feiten zitten maken het soms moeilijk onderzoek te doen.’

⁵⁵⁵ ‘Blij om iets te kunnen doen en ook blij dat de namen van al die mensen niet worden vergeten.’

‘It helps that I can contribute out of genealogical perspective, in order to ameliorate representation of people at that monument.’⁵⁵⁶

“‘Happy” (wrong word in this case) to be able to do something, but also feelings that it all comes too close. To read 80 times on one day ‘died in Sobibor’ is hard sometimes.”⁵⁵⁷

One of the participants mentions that he was angry: ‘Sometimes I am angry, what a horrible ink-black period it has been in our history. The monument is a boost to do the work properly but also to position yourself in society.’⁵⁵⁸

There are also some participants who say that, because of the fact that they are doing research, they should not be affected by emotions: ‘The huge sorrow is there, but it has to stay in the background in order to develop a historical document.’⁵⁵⁹

The Digital Monument and Community offer many advantages to this fourth group of participants, like accessibility 24/7, worldwide accessibility, the vast amount of data which can be used for research purposes: ‘[...] An impressive source of research.’⁵⁶⁰

One participant mentions that: ‘It is modern and it shows that also with new media victims can be commemorated and probably this will appeal to many young people.’⁵⁶¹

Another participant mentions that: ‘To me personal there are neither dis- nor advantages. But if it concerns the Community Jewish Monument, our generation should not consider itself in the first place. The victims come in first place, to return their identity. And besides this, you should only consider the advantages. What can our society learn, and what can we and our children learn?’⁵⁶²

Overall, this group of participants holds a positive opinion on Digital Monument and Community and considers it a valuable addition to research.

⁵⁵⁶ ‘Het doet me goed dat ik vanuit de genealogie een bijdrage kan leveren waardoor personen bij het monument op een juistere manier kunnen worden weergegeven.’

⁵⁵⁷ “‘Blij” (slecht woord in dit geval) om nog iets te kunnen doen, maar ook een gevoel dat het te dichtbij komt. Op een dag tachtig keer “overleden te Sobibor” te moeten lezen valst soms niet mee.’

⁵⁵⁸ ‘Soms boos, wat een verschrikkelijke inktzwarte periode in onze geschiedenis is het geweest, het monument is een stimulans om werk goed te kunnen doen maar ook als mens op een bepaalde manier in de samenleving te staan.’

⁵⁵⁹ ‘Het grote leed is er maar moet op de achtergrond blijven om een historisch document te kunnen ontwikkelen.’

⁵⁶⁰ ‘[...] Een geweldige bron voor historisch onderzoek.’

⁵⁶¹ ‘Het is modern en het laat zien dat ook met de nieuwe media slachtoffers kunnen worden herdacht en waarschijnlijk spreekt dit ook veel jonge mensen aan.’

⁵⁶² ‘Voor mij persoonlijk heeft het geen voor- of nadelen. Maar als het gaat over de Community Joods Monument moet je (onze generatie) ook niet alleen als eerste aan jezelf denken. Het gaat om de slachtoffers, hun eigen identiteit terug te geven. En daarnaast moet je alleen naar de voordelen kijken. Wat kan onze maatschappij er van leren, wat kunnen wij en onze kinderen hier van leren?’

4.10.3 Results of the interview

Interview with Mrs. Martine Letterie


One of the participants from this group was asked for an interview. Mrs. Martine Letterie was born in 1958 and has no Jewish origins. Martine is a professional author of books for children. In 2008, she published a (children's) book on the life of her own father. His father, Martine's grandfather, was deported to concentration camp Neuengamme, where he died in 1942.⁵⁶³

Martine uses the Digital Monument and Community for her books. In 2012, she wrote a children's book on the life of Margaretha Swart, a Jewish girl from Amsterdam who lived in the institution Apeldoornsche Bosch. In 1943, all inhabitants were deported to Auschwitz and murdered in the gas chambers.⁵⁶⁴

Margaretha Swart

Amsterdam, 9 December 1926
Auschwitz, 25 January 1943
Maid servant
Reached the age of 16

Do you have extra information about Margaretha Swart?
[Add information in the Community »](#)



Jesaia Swart and his family » ⓘ
Czaar Peterstraat 43 huis, Amsterdam »

Jesaia Swart » ⓘ
Amsterdam, 15 February 1884
Mauthausen, 14 October 1942
Head of family

Saartje Swart-Levitus » ⓘ
Bellingwolde, 26 August 1885
Auschwitz, 5 October 1942
Spouse

Hijman Swart » ⓘ
Amsterdam, 29 November 1911
Extern kommando Melk, 26 March 1945
Son

Nathan Swart » ⓘ
Amsterdam, 22 September 1920
Buchenwald, 14 March 1945
Son

Margaretha Swart was the ninth child of Jesaja Swart and Saartje Levitus. She was born at 10 Valkenburgerstraat in Amsterdam. After completing the Jewish school on the Valkenburgerstraat, she worked as a maid servant. Because her parents thought she would be safer, they allowed her to move to the Paedagogium Achisomog, part of the Apeldoornse Bos. She moved to Apeldoorn on 1 March 1942.

When the Apeldoornse Bos was evacuated on Thursday, 21 January 1943, and all residents, patients and staff were deported from the station in Apeldoorn in cattle cars directly to Auschwitz, Margaretha Swart was among them.

A photocopy remains of Margaretha Swart's birth certificate, as well as photocopies of letters that she wrote from Apeldoorn on 12 December 1942 and 20 January 1943 and of a postcard dated 20 January 1943.
Joods Historisch Museum, Documentenverzameling, inv.nr 10289, ordner 6

Personal page of Margaretha Swart in the Digital Monument⁵⁶⁵

Kamp Westerbork commissioned her to write a book, intended for children who are still too young to read Anne Frank's diary. Accordingly, in 2013 she published *De groeten van Leo. Een kind in kamp Westerbork*, a book on the life of Leo Meijer, a boy of seven years old, who lived for two years with his

⁵⁶³ LETTERIE: *Oorlog zonder vader*.

⁵⁶⁴ LETTERIE: *Hanna's reis*.

⁵⁶⁵ www.joodsmonument.nl/person/527368, accessed July 26, 2013.

family in Kamp Westerbork before being deported to Theresiënstadt.⁵⁶⁶ Leo and his mother were later on deported to Auschwitz where they died in the gas chambers on October 4, 1944. Leo's father survived the war.⁵⁶⁷

Practices and commemoration

Martine's intention with her books, is to contribute to the commemoration of these 'horrible deportations'.⁵⁶⁸ In her opinion: 'It is best to commemorate the victims by giving them "a face". I add information I found regarding research for my books, to the Community and I use the information on the Monument and Community for my books.'⁵⁶⁹

Martine says: 'I am a writer of children's books and I wish that my books contribute to the commemoration of the Dutch victims of the Shoah, but also of non-Jewish victims of the Second World War.'⁵⁷⁰

Meaning and opinion

During the war, her grandfather, Martinus Letterie (1908-1942), was arrested because of his practices in the communist party. He was first taken to Kamp Amersfoort, a Dutch Nazi concentration camp, and after that to concentration camp Neuengamme. He died in Neuengamme in 1942.⁵⁷¹ Martine was named after her grandfather. At the moment, Martine is the chair of the Dutch Vriendenkring Neuengamme, the society of 'friends' of Neuengamme. This society mainly holds family and relatives from the second and third generation with an interest in the fortunes of their deceased family members.⁵⁷² Instead of a public monument, the Vriendenkring took the initiative to record the history of the Dutch prisoners of Neuengamme on paper. In 2005, this history was published and presented as a 'paper monument'. The objective was to describe the reality of the camp in all aspects.⁵⁷³

The Vriendenkring commissioned a second book to remember and honour the 300 Dutch prisoners of Neuengamme, who were killed when British pilots bombed the passenger ship *Cap Arcona* at the Lüberbeckerbocht, thinking that they were attacking German soldiers who were transported on the ship. They were not aware that the *Cap Arcona* was packed with thousands of prisoners from concentration camp Neuengamme. Around 7,000 to 8,000 people were killed, as said, among them were 300 prisoners originating from the Netherlands.⁵⁷⁴ There is no monument in the Netherlands to commemorate the victims, both books act as a 'paper' monument, 'instead of' public art monuments.

⁵⁶⁶ LETTERIE: *De groeten van Leo. Een kind in kamp Westerbork*.

⁵⁶⁷ Leo Meijer is also mentioned in LUIJTERS *In memoriam* on page 798 and his picture is shown on page 802.

⁵⁶⁸ LETTERIE: *Hanna's reis* 172.

⁵⁶⁹ 'We kunnen de slachtoffers het best herdenken door ze een gezicht te geven. Ik vul gegevens aan en gebruik de gevonden gegevens voor mijn jeugdboeken.'

⁵⁷⁰ 'Ik schrijf jeugdboeken. Ik hoop dat die aanleiding zijn tot het herdenken van de Nederlandse slachtoffers van de Shoah en van niet-Joodse slachtoffers van de Tweede Wereldoorlog.'

⁵⁷¹ SCHUYF (red.): *Nederlanders in Neuengamme* 410.

⁵⁷² SCHUYF (red.): *Nederlanders in Neuengamme* 14.

⁵⁷³ SCHUYF (red.): *Nederlanders in Neuengamme*.

⁵⁷⁴ GEERTSEMA: *De ramp in de Lübeckerbocht*.

The Vriendenkring manages a database, including all Dutch prisoners of Neuengamme, in which is archived whether they survived or not. This database was constructed with the intention to inform relatives about their family members who were imprisoned in Neuengamme. At the moment, discussions are held within the council of the Vriendenkring, to create and transform this database into a digital monument. The decision has been made and proposals are written, the problem is to find the appropriate funding to create a digital monument. Martine says:

‘It is very obvious that the book *Nederlanders in Neuengamme* is used as a monument, this is how it was intended. We have done a lot of research on all the names and this is an ongoing project. The intention is to transform it into a digital monument so that it can be accessed worldwide.’⁵⁷⁵

In conclusion

Mrs. Martine Letterie contributes to the Digital Monument and Community information she has gathered and which she deems valuable, and she uses information she discovers at the site with regard to her writing activities. In her perspective, writing about the victims of the Shoah is a means of commemoration.

She considers a digital monument a valuable commemoration practice, not only with regard to the victims of the Shoah, but also regarding other groups of Second World War victims, for instance the victims of concentration camp Neuengamme.

4.11 ‘Postponed’ commemoration of the Shoah: context of web memorializing practices

Sabine Marschall, in her research on the impact of information technology on collective memory and commemoration in Southern Africa, describes three temporally successive but also co-existing phases. The historically eldest phase refers to indigenous memory practices. The second phase is marked by the introduction of what Marschall calls ‘European models of collective remembrance’, including museums, monuments, memorials, statues, archives, and other types of *lieux de mémoire*.⁵⁷⁶ We have now come into a ‘third phase’, with online commemoration and digital forms of memorialization, which make use of electronic devices and the internet.

According to Marschall, in South Africa, online commemoration is still a marginal phenomenon, but it will probably increase in significance very soon because younger people will be attracted. However, in her opinion, online forms of commemoration will never ‘replace commemorative monuments and other tangible memory sites of the real world.’⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ ‘Het boek *Nederlanders in Neuengamme* wordt heel duidelijk gebruikt als monument, zo is het bedoeld. We hebben alles uitgezocht en het is een enorme namenlijst geworden die elke keer weer wordt aangevuld en eigenlijk willen we dit ook digitaal hebben zodat het wereldwijd toegankelijk is.’

⁵⁷⁶ MARSCHALL: ‘The virtual memory landscape’ 193-194.

⁵⁷⁷ MARSCHALL: ‘The virtual memory landscape’ 194.

Marschall's research was focused on South Africa, nevertheless her concept of 'phases' seems relevant to describe developments in other countries, like for instance the Netherlands.

With regard to the online commemoration and digitalization of the Shoah in the Netherlands, it is relevant to determine in what 'phase' we are. The Digital Monument was launched in 2005, followed by the Community in 2010. Are these web-based memorializing activities unique, or do they represent a current 'trend'? Has the Netherlands also reached a next 'phase' in commemoration practices?

These issues will be explored in the next paragraph by starting with a short historical overview on monuments remembering the Dutch victims of the Shoah. Next, the focus will be on today's commemoration of the victims, zooming in on the practices and projects of the institutions assembled in the Jewish Cultural Quarter in Amsterdam, being the context of the Digital Monument and Community. Last, I will describe recent national commemoration projects and see in what way they connect to the practices of the Jewish Cultural Quarter. All these recent projects may be considered, in line with the central theme of this research project, as a form of 'postponed' commemoration.

4.11.1 After the war: the remembrance of Jewish victims in the Netherlands

Van Ginkel, in his elaborate work on Dutch Second War commemoration, divided the postwar period in two phases.⁵⁷⁸

The first phase refers to the period starting directly after the war in 1945 to the mid-sixties. This period meant the start of a Second World War memory culture. Monuments erected at that time, referred to the so called 'national myth of repression and resistance', leaving no room for the experiences and traumas of specific groups of victims.⁵⁷⁹

Van Ginkel states, that most first phase monuments are, on the subject of form and symbolism, closely related to grave stones. In this early period, monuments have the same objective, that is to honour the death, and remembrance of the war and the warfare in a direct manner.⁵⁸⁰

In this period, only rarely monuments were raised to honour victims of the Shoah. If a monument was raised, this was done within the Jewish community, and most of the times the monuments were erected at Jewish graveyards.⁵⁸¹

In 1948 for instance, a monument was erected at the Jewish graveyard in the city of Muiderberg. In his dedication speech, Rabbi Tal emphasized that within the Jewish community there was no need of signs of remembrance like monuments. According to Rabbi Tal, every hour, every day, the Jewish community is surrounded by the remembrance of those who went away: 'It is dark and black around us.'⁵⁸² According to Tal, signs of remembrance are needed for those who need these signs to learn about the atrocities of the Shoah. Monuments are not only signs of remembrance, but also signs of blame and guilt

⁵⁷⁸ Van GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 39.

⁵⁷⁹ Van GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 68.

⁵⁸⁰ Van GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 106.

⁵⁸¹ Van GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 119.

⁵⁸² Cited by RAMAKER & VAN BOHEMEN: *Sta een ogenblik stil...* 132.

of those who did nothing to prevent the Shoah. Monuments should be signs to the whole world of what could have been done.

Ramaker and Van Bohemen conclude that shame is an additional reason why in the early period after the war, no monuments for Jewish victims have been erected: ‘These monuments weigh heavy on the conscience of many who stood by and did not act.’⁵⁸³

Consequently, until the mid-1970s, little initiative was taken outside the Jewish community with regard to the erection of monuments.

After 1965, the remembrance of the war started to change, resulting in an enlarged interest in the suffering of individuals during the war. According to Van Ginkel, as a result, monuments were erected regarding groups, events or persons which had been, until that time, ‘forgotten’ or neglected in commemoration. Van Ginkel substantiates his arguments with figures. Between 1945-1955, about 70 monuments in remembrance of Jewish victims were erected. More than 60% of this number was erected in the period immediately postwar; between 1948-1951.⁵⁸⁴ Most of these monuments were erected at Jewish graveyards and around synagogues, and thus not at public places.

The next period, Van Ginkel considers is the period 1960-1984. In this period 57 monuments were erected, while in the period 1985-2009, this number had risen to 239, meaning that in the same period of time, 24 years, four times more monuments had been raised.⁵⁸⁵ Generally known are the Auschwitz monument in Amsterdam, designed by Jan Wolkers in 1977, and the monuments in the former concentration camps Vught and Westerbork.

4.11.2 Renewing commemoration: the activities of the Jewish Cultural Quarter

Since the time they have been assigned with the task to coordinate the Digital Monument, the Jewish Historical Museum has stimulated commemoration practices with regard to the Shoah. As explained above, both Digital Monument and Community are coordinated by the Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historical Museum) in Amsterdam. Nowadays, this museum makes part of the Joods Cultureel Kwartier (Jewish Cultural Quarter) of Amsterdam.⁵⁸⁶ This Jewish Cultural Quarter is a cooperation between four (historical) locations in the former Jewish neighbourhood of Amsterdam:

- Jewish Historical Museum;
- Jewish Historical Museum: Children’s Museum;
- Portuguese Synagogue;
- Dutch Theatre (Hollandsche Schouwburg).

⁵⁸³ RAMAKER & VAN BOHEMEN: *Sta een ogenblik stil...* 132.

⁵⁸⁴ VAN GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 393.

⁵⁸⁵ VAN GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 394.

⁵⁸⁶ www.joodscultureelkwartier.nl, accessed July 25, 2013.

Under the heading ‘Renewing commemoration. Online and on-site commemoration at the Jewish Cultural Quarter Amsterdam’,⁵⁸⁷ different projects have been developed. They are all closely related to the Digital Monument and Community and have resulted in connecting people to the subject of the Shoah, to each other, and to the museum. Both, Digital Monument and Community, inspire and facilitate projects such as educational programs, the ‘Jewish homes mobile app’, and the project ‘Open Jewish Homes’.

The objective of these projects is an innovation of commemoration, and accordingly enabling appropriation of the history of the Shoah by the general public.

In 2010, the educational project ‘A house with a story’ was introduced at the website of the Digital Monument and Community. With this educational project for children, aged 11 to 14 years old, one of the objectives of the Digital Monument and Community which is related to education, has been reached. An iPod interface between the Wall of Names in the Hollandsche Schouwburg was also presented in 2010. During the war, this popular theatre served as the place where all Jews were assembled after they had been taken from their homes, and before they were deported to the camps. After the war, the Hollandsche Schouwburg became a monument and a memorial place. In 1962, a monument was placed in order to remember the Jewish victims of the Shoah. In 1993, a *Chapelle ardente*, a memorial chapel, was dedicated. At the wall of this chapel, the 6,700 family names of the 104,000 Jews from the Netherlands who became victim of the Shoah, have been listed. These family names have been integrated into the database of the Digital Monument. With the aid of a special iPod, called an *ikPod*, it is possible for visitors to read the wall of names and link these names to the family pages on the Digital Monument. Holding the *ikPod* in front of a particular family name and clicking on this name which will appear on the screen of the *ikPod*, information on the family and its individual members will be shown. This enables commemoration of individual victims and connects the physical monument to the online monument. Under the title ‘A name and a place for everyone’, the *Chapelle ardente* will be transformed into a new commemoration room where personalization of commemoration is the main theme.⁵⁸⁸

In 2012, the *Open Joodse huizen* (‘Open Jewish homes’)⁵⁸⁹ project was organized for the first time. The objective of this commemorative project is, that present residents of so called ‘Jewish homes’, being residencies which were occupied or owned during the war by Jewish people, organize small scale commemoration ceremonies during the first weekend of May. The background idea is that present residents and visitors of the ceremonies become aware of the history of these residences. With the aid of the Digital Monument, information on streets and homes and its occupancy during the war may be retrieved. This project is accompanied by a so called ‘poster action’. Actual residents of a Jewish home are asked to print out a poster through the family web page on the Digital Monument, and hang this poster at their window during the national commemoration of the war on May 4. The names of the Jewish residents during the war are printed on this poster, as well as their dates of birth and death.

⁵⁸⁷ Personal communication Anat Harel, editor Community, Jewish Historical Museum, July 19, 2013.

⁵⁸⁸ www.hollandscheschouwburg.nl/en/current/renewal/ikpod, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁵⁸⁹ *Nieuwsbrief Community Maart 2013*, www.communityjoodsmonument.nl/page/322128/nl, accessed July 19, 2013.



In 2012, the *Open Joodse huizen* project was organized in Amsterdam in 21 homes and 1,500 visitors attended the ceremonies. The project was well received, and consequently, in 2013, the project was extended. Besides Amsterdam, five other Dutch cities participated: Borne, Den Haag, Elburg, Groningen and Tilburg. Ceremonies were organized in 60 homes, receiving 4,500 visitors which makes it a successful nationwide commemoration practice which has its base in the Digital Monument.⁵⁹⁰

In 2012, a Jewish homes application for mobile phones was introduced. This location based application, enables users to learn about the residencies of deported families in the neighbourhood of the user's current location.

Mobile phone application Jewish homes⁵⁹¹

4.11.3 Today's commemoration of the Dutch victims of the Shoah in other cities of the Netherlands

The abovementioned projects are initiated by the Jewish Historical Quarter in Amsterdam. In other cities, commemoration of the Jewish victims of the Shoah is also a topical subject. In this paragraph a number of relevant and interesting, with regard to the research theme, projects will be presented.

Rotterdam: Kindermonument

In 1942, in a warehouse, known as Loods 24, in the Dutch city of Rotterdam, all Jewish citizens from Rotterdam and the isles of Zuid-Holland, around 15,000, were assembled and consequently deported to the concentration camps. Among them were 686 Jewish children. All of whom were killed, either in Auschwitz or Sobibor. A small piece of the wall of the warehouse has been dedicated as a monument to honour these victims of the Shoah. This monument was erected in 1992.

On April 10, 2013, a monument dedicated to the Jewish children of Rotterdam was inaugurated. The objective of this monument especially in remembrance of the children was:

⁵⁹⁰ www.communityjoodsmonument.nl/page/250216, accessed July 22, 2013 and personal communication Anat Harel, Jewish Historical Museum, July 19, 2013.

⁵⁹¹ www.communityjoodsmonument.nl/page/324420, accessed November 13, 2013.

‘To commemorate them, add extra weight to the act of remembrance and hence deepen public awareness and support for these past events. Although the events took place a long time ago, these ‘defenceless’ children are nevertheless an integral part of the tragic story of the Second World War. This is primarily why we are seeking to create this remarkable memorial.’⁵⁹²

The monument was designed by a well-known Dutch architect, Wim Quist (1930), who himself witnessed scenes of families being deported. The text on the monument refers to a text from the book Ruth 4:10 which reads: ‘[...] So that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witness.’⁵⁹³

Next to the monument, a website was launched (www.kindermonument.net), because ‘A monument like this keeps only the memory of the atrocities alive. That is not enough for today and neither with regard to the future.’⁵⁹⁴ The list of the names of the children may be found, not only on the monument, but also on the website. The objective of this website is, next to publishing of the names, to give notice of educational projects. A first project is called ‘You belong in our class’, which may be accessed through this website. A special educational programme was introduced in Rotterdam schools with the theme: ‘What happened to Jewish children during the Second World War in Rotterdam in the vicinity of your school.’⁵⁹⁵ The objective of these educational projects is to warn against, and create awareness of the dangers of discriminating developments in the world nowadays.

*Vught: ‘Alle kinderen, ze zijn weg’*⁵⁹⁶

The Rotterdam monument, especially dedicated to Jewish child victims of the Shoah, is not the only one in this category. The Hague has a similar monument, and another example is the Jewish children monument in Kamp Vught: the monument Kindergedenkteken. In June 1943, 1,269 children and their parents were deported and killed in Sobibor.⁵⁹⁷ This monument was designed by sculptor Teus van den Berg-Been (1926), and dedicated in 1999. At this monument, names and ages of the children who were deported are listed.

In 2013, to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the deportation, for the first time the events were explained and revealed in an exposition with the title *Alle kinderen, ze zijn weg* (‘All children, they have gone’). The objective was to bring back to memory the events and the children by means of showing their pictures, telling their life stories, and by eyewitness reports.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹² www.kindermonument.net/english, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁵⁹³ www.biblica.com/bibles/chapter/?verse=Ruth+4&version=niv, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁵⁹⁴ www.kindermonument.net/english, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁵⁹⁵ www.kindermonument.net/onderwijs, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁵⁹⁶ www.nmkampvught.nl/index.php?id=45, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁵⁹⁷ www.nmkampvught.nl/index.php?id=45, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁵⁹⁸ www.nmkampvught.nl/index.php?id=2246, accessed July 22, 2013.

One of these eyewitnesses was another Jewish prisoner of Kamp Vught, a woman named Klaartje de Zwart-Walvisch. Her diary was found only a couple of years ago.⁵⁹⁹ The day after the deportations, she wrote in her diary: ‘Only those who have experienced this sorrow personally, they will understand. And those who did not experience it and will read about it sometime, they will have to understand. They will have to know the great sorrow that has been done to us.’⁶⁰⁰

An extensive memory culture, including monument, exposition, and eyewitness accounts, should make people aware nowadays of the ‘great sorrow’ that has been done to these Jewish children and their relatives.

Apeldoorn: Commemoration of the deportation of Het Apeldoornsche Bosch

An interesting ‘postponed’ act of commemoration in 2013, regards the seventieth commemoration of the deportation in January, 1943, of all Jewish inhabitants of the psychiatric institution Het Apeldoornsche Bosch, near the city of Apeldoorn. Around 1,069 patients, among them 40 members of the personnel, were deported to Auschwitz. Most of them died. In 1990, a monument by Ralph Prins (1926) to commemorate the victims was erected, and in 2009, at the site of the institution, commemorative signs were placed to indicate the different locations of the institution.⁶⁰¹

There had never been an exact list with the names of the people who had been deported. In 2008, it became clear that in the municipal archives of Amsterdam, a list with names of the patients was found. This list was carefully compared with other lists, and in 2013 this list was published on the internet.⁶⁰² At the commemoration in 2013, names were shown and mentioned.

Next to a monument in the public area, also an internet commemoration was initiated by means of the list with names of the victims. In cooperation with Kamp Westerbork, a database with names can be accessed and consulted.

And, also, an educational project was developed regarding children in the age from 11 to 14 years. Martine Letterie, author of children’s literature, was asked to write a book, *Hanna’s reis*, and educational projects were developed next to this book. The book tells the story of one of the children, Margaretha Swart, living in the institution, who herself was deported and never returned.⁶⁰³ These projects may all be approached through a website www.hannasreis.nl.

⁵⁹⁹ ZWIERS (red.): *Alles ging aan flarden. Het oorlogsdagboek van Klaartje de Zwart-Walvisch*.

⁶⁰⁰ ‘Alleen zij die dit leed persoonlijk meegemaakt hebben, zij zullen het begrijpen. En zij die het niet meegemaakt hebben en dit eens zullen lezen, zij moeten het begrijpen. Zij moeten weten het grote leed dat ons is aangedaan,’ ZWIERS (red.): *Alles ging aan flarden. Het oorlogsdagboek van Klaartje de Zwart-Walvisch* 143.

⁶⁰¹ www.apeldoornschebosch.nl/index.html, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁶⁰² www.apeldoornschebosch.nl/nieuws/items/herinneringscentrum-kamp-westerbork/10452.html, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁶⁰³ LETTERIE: *Hanna’s reis*.

*Kamp Westerbork: 'Een naam en een gezicht'*⁶⁰⁴

Above, the database which is constructed in Kamp Westerbork, was already shortly mentioned. Below, a short description and background will be presented on this database which has, at present, no connection with the Digital Monument and Community.

During the Second World War, in total around 140,000 Jews were registered in the Netherlands. More than 107,000 of them were deported to the camps, between 5,400 and 5,500 of them survived the camps. Several hundreds of Jews died in Dutch prisons or concentration camps, in particular in Vught and Amersfoort. In between 102,000 and 103,000 deported Jews from the Netherlands were killed in German concentration camps.⁶⁰⁵ Most of them were deported from Kamp Westerbork, (concentration camp Westerbork) in the eastern part of the Netherlands, from where they were transported by train to the destruction camps.

It has always been difficult to decide on the exact figures, but in Westerbork they work with the number of 102,000 victims, while the Digital Monument and Community hold the number of 104,000. The difference might be, that the Digital Monument uses a wider category of victims of the persecution, for instance people who died immediately after the war are also included.

The names of the victims with their date of birth and place, as well as the place and date of their killing, are registered in Kamp Westerbork in a database called *Een naam en een gezicht* ('A name and a face').⁶⁰⁶ A database has been developed and work is continuing on the data. This database is not available on the internet, but if information is needed, a request has to be sent to Kamp Westerbork.

At the site of Kamp Westerbork, several monuments commemorate the events of the Second World War. Besides the Nationaal Monument Westerbork, designed by survivor and artist Ralph Prins (1926), 102,000 stones refer to the victims. These little stones have all been placed within the boundaries of the map of the Netherlands. On top of the stones, stars of David have been placed, symbolizing the Jewish victims. 213 stones have a little flame on top of them. They symbolize a group of Sinti and Roma gypsy people who were deported from Westerbork and killed in Auschwitz. Hundreds of stones bear no symbol; they represent people from the Dutch resistance who were imprisoned in Westerbork before being deported.⁶⁰⁷

In Memoriam

Another, fascinating and touching, project with the objective of retrieving the names and faces of Jewish children, needs mentioning. The results of many years of research were published in 2012 in a comprehensive book called *In Memoriam. De gedeporteerde en vermoorde Joodse, Roma en Sinti*

⁶⁰⁴ 'A name and a face': www.kampwesterbork.nl/nl/museum/archief-en-collectie/een-naam-en-een-gezicht/index.html#/index, accessed July 25, 2013.

⁶⁰⁵ GRIFFIOEN & ZELLER: *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België 1940-1945* 442-443.

⁶⁰⁶ www.kampwesterbork.nl/museum/archief-en-collectie/een-gezicht/index.html#/index, accessed July 22, 2013.

⁶⁰⁷ www.kampwesterbork.nl/nl/museum/kampterrein/de-102000-stenen/index.html#/index, accessed July 22, 2013.

kinderen 1942-1945. Guus Luijters (1943) was researcher and author, and Aline Pennewaard (1978) acted as editor of the pictures.⁶⁰⁸ The author was inspired by Serge Klarsfeld's memorial book on the French Jewish children, who were victim of the Shoah: *Le mémorial des enfants Juives déportés de France*. This book was published in 1995.⁶⁰⁹

The objective of Luijters was to 'keep the Dutch children from the anonymity of the big numbers, to return to them their name and face and indirectly their family and, if possible, return to them a face.'⁶¹⁰ This book is organized through dates and lists of transportation to the camps, names, dates and cities of birth and death, and last known addresses, accompanied by pictures and stories on the children. The entire book comprises almost 1,000 pages on 17,964 Jewish children. Pictures of 3,000 children could be published. Publication of the book was accompanied by an exposition of the pictures and the stories. *In Memoriam* and the exposition were well received and many readers and visitors of the exposition recognized children as their former friends or school mates. The authors were 'overrun' by an overflow of response, and many new pictures and information could be supplemented to the database. Later on, in 2012, an *Addendum* could be published with an additional 700 pictures.

Most of the names of the children can be found on the Digital Monument and Community, and Luijters made use of the data on the Digital Monument and Community.

4.11.4 In conclusion

The projects discussed in this paragraph, are an illustration of the many projects that have been started in the Netherlands in the recent period. I especially looked for projects with web-based memorializing activities, or with a link to the Digital Monument and Community. I accordingly discussed these projects in this paragraph, and my findings demonstrate that there seems to be a trend to connect physical monuments to web-based activities, like commemoration activities, educational activities, or a combination of both.

In this respect, we may conclude that the Netherlands has also entered a next phase of commemoration practices, like suggested by Marschall.⁶¹¹ However, these online practices seem to be accompanied by offline commemoration practices, and they do not seem to become a replacement for these more traditional practices. This is also in line with Marschall's conclusion with regard to web-based commemoration practices in South Africa.⁶¹²

The current objective of commemoration may be summarized in returning the Dutch victims of the Shoah: 'A name and a face, lest they be forgotten.' Many projects have the objective, not only to show

⁶⁰⁸ LUIJTERS: *In Memoriam. De gedeporteerde en vermoorde Joodse, Roma en Sinti kinderen 1942-1945*.

⁶⁰⁹ LUIJTERS: *In Memoriam. De gedeporteerde en vermoorde Joodse, Roma en Sinti kinderen 1942-1945* 12.

⁶¹⁰ LUIJTERS: *In Memoriam. De gedeporteerde en vermoorde Joodse, Roma en Sinti kinderen 1942-1945* 12.

⁶¹¹ MARSCHALL: 'The virtual memory landscape' 193-194.

⁶¹² MARSCHALL: 'The virtual memory landscape' 194.

the number of victims, but reveal in particular who they were, their name, day of birth and death, and where they lived.

This objective is applied in particular with regard to projects with a focus on child victims of the Shoah and other undervalued groups, like psychiatric patients, groups of people to whom not much attention was paid previously, and who did not have a voice of their own.

A last interesting aspect that needs mentioning, is the current focus of many projects on the places where Jewish people lived at the time of their deportation, and the objective to create ‘awareness’ of this fact with the present residents.⁶¹³

4.12 Concluding remarks

This research on practices and meaning of the Digital Monument and Community has been a qualitative and explorative exercise, in line with the general set-up of this study. The concluding remarks, presented hereafter, should be interpreted in this way.

The dimensions of ‘co-production’ of memory and ‘voice’ as proposed by Foot, Warnick, and Schneider, have been defined as distinguishing features of the Digital Monument and Community. They will be leading, regarding the concluding remarks. However, I will first go back to the issue of virtual commemoration practices in comparison with more traditional commemoration practices.⁶¹⁴

The first objective of the Digital Monument and Community is to reconstruct the picture of the Jewish community in the Netherlands at the eve of their destruction by means of ‘returning’ to each individual victim his or her identity.

Both enable ‘double individualized’ commemoration: commemoration of each individual victim by means of returning their identity, and individualized commemoration, at home, alone or in a small group at each person’s own time, instead of mass organized ceremonies at dedicated days.

In 1998, Geser feared that commemoration practices at a virtual memorial would be limited to ‘behaviour extremely short in time and extremely unrelated to any other social involvements. It becomes a small “intermezzo”, during surfing activities [...]’⁶¹⁵ The results of the research on practices and meaning of the Digital Monument and Community show that, although practices are mostly limited in time, they do not have the character of an ‘intermezzo’ in between other internet activities. Within all groups of participants, even within the group of participants without direct personal involvement in the Shoah, the practices evoke deeply felt emotions raised by the enormous amount of names, the ages, and the stories behind the victims.

⁶¹³ In this respect also the so called *Stolpersteine* (‘stumbling stones or blocks’) project needs mentioning: the objective of this project is to put a commemorative brass stone with the names of the victims engraved, in front of their last address. This project was initiated by the German artist Gunter Demnig (1947). Up till now, in over 610 places in several countries *stolpersteine* have been placed: www.stolpersteine.com, accessed November 13, 2013.

⁶¹⁴ FOOT, WARNICK & SCHNEIDER: ‘Web-based memorializing after September 11’ 88-91.

⁶¹⁵ GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 20.

First generation participants consider the monument as the ‘true form’ of commemoration of the victims, and they seem to be hesitant about the value and use of the Community. The monument is considered to ‘replace’ or to function as a graveyard, a place to visit and to commemorate. In this respect, the Monument functions as an ‘organic tombstone’, by means of the Community capable of growth and evolution, and always open for new inputs from persons wherever and whenever they are.⁶¹⁶

For a long period after the war, participants within this group have had difficulties in sharing their personal memories with others. The Digital Monument and Community appear to have a function within this group to help them handling their emotions by contributing their personal stories to the Digital Monument and Community. Many participants within this group have assisted right from the start in completing the names and data on the Digital Monument. In line with Casey, there seems to be a ‘healing’ effect in expressing oneself in a public, in this case a virtual, environment.⁶¹⁷ The results of the research also show that the site offers many opportunities to co-produce memory, and where every individual input or voice bears the same value.

The element of co-production is maybe even better illustrated by the other groups of participants. Within the other groups of participants, the Community is highly valued and being able to connect to other users is important. Many participants consider their practices as a contribution to their family history, but also as a more general form of contributing to the history of the Shoah. The site is considered as a means of sharing knowledge, but also to create public awareness of the Shoah. This objective of awareness becomes more private when, for example, individual people realize that their current residence used to be occupied by Jewish families at the eve of their deportation.

Although these younger groups of participants consider all their practices as commemoration, the Digital Monument and Community do not seem to replace the ‘traditional’ commemoration ceremonies; they are considered as an addition to them. This also seems to be the case within the group of first generation participants, and may confirm Marschall’s opinion on web-based commemoration practices in general.⁶¹⁸

In conclusion: the Digital Monument and Community seem to be valuable contributions to commemoration practices of the Shoah, a place 24/7 accessible for commemoration from all over the world, where each one can contribute to the memory of the Dutch victims of the Shoah at one’s own place and time. In this respect, the Digital Monument and Community form a ‘living monument’, not closed but open, and which will continue to grow in future.

⁶¹⁶ In line with the conclusion of Geser: GESER: ‘Yours virtually forever’ 27.

⁶¹⁷ CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’.

⁶¹⁸ MARSCHALL: ‘The virtual memory landscape’ 194.

Chapter 5

Monuments to stillborn children

*Things to remember, places to go...*⁶¹⁹

5.1 Introduction

Probably one of the most difficult situation parents have to face, is when their new born child is found with serious life threatening medical problems. A very emotional situation will arise when there is no hope the child will live. The mother may physically not be able to fully comprehend the near death of her child, born only minutes ago. The moment of welcoming to this world and saying farewell almost coincides. The way of acting of health care professionals, like doctors, midwives or nurses, at this confusing and emotional moment is of the utmost importance to the parents. In a documentary on premature children and the difficult situation around their birth, this is very well shown; a doctor tells the father that they are unable to save his child, just born at 26 weeks of pregnancy. The child will soon die. The doctor, very compassionately, tells the father, who is evidently shocked about this announcement: ‘Touch your child, give him a kiss with all you have in you, everything you have in your mind, give it to your child.’⁶²⁰ The doctor has to repeat her message, because the father only slowly starts to comprehend the impact of the message, but does what the doctor advises him to do, and kisses his child farewell while he starts to cry. He then leaves the room, probably to go and tell his wife about the terrible news.

This documentary was made in 2008 and offers an impressive insight into the intimate caring of children in danger of death around their birth. A caring which seems to be completely different from the situation until about 30 years ago. Until the 1980s, the death of children around their birth was completely different ‘handled’ by health care professionals, as follows from the testimony of Mrs. J. She was not allowed to see or to touch her child: ‘They did not tell me why I was not allowed to see her. It was my child, our child. There was no explanation, nor any comfort.’⁶²¹

Next to the absent intimate contact between child and parents, children who died shortly before, during, or shortly after birth, were not given a funeral with the traditional funeral services. The hospi-

⁶¹⁹ From the song ‘Pretty maids all in a row’ by The Eagles (1976).

⁶²⁰ Documentary on the Neonatology Unit of the Academic Hospital in Groningen, the Netherlands *Als we het zouden weten* (2008), Petra Lataster-Czisch & Peter Lataster, www.hollanddoc.nl/kijk-luister/documentaire/a/als-we-het-zouden-weten0.html, accessed August 1, 2013.

⁶²¹ ‘Ze vertelde me niet waarom dat was. Het was mijn kind, ons kind. Er was geen enkele uitleg of troost.’

tal, or the father, took care of the burial and nobody ever spoke again about what had happened, as Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard says:

‘And that was is it! I was only 22 years old at the time and let it all happen because I thought that was the way it ought to happen. You came home empty-handed, and the child’s bedroom had already been cleared and everything was soon business as usual.’⁶²²

Most of the times, these stillborn children were commemorated in private places and did not belong to public commemoration. The dedication of a monument to stillborn children in 2001, in the Dutch village of Reutum, caused an avalanche of attention in the public media. The affair was thus taken from private commemoration, to commemoration in the public area.

The initiative to this monument was taken by Jan Kerkhof Jonkman, a Roman Catholic deacon. He remembers that when he was a child, his father had to go to the unconsecrated grounds of the graveyard to bury his stillborn sister himself. The Roman Catholic priest did not care for her, because she had not been baptized. He still remembers the sorrow of his parents. At All Souls in the catholic Holy Year 2000, which carried the theme *mea culpa*, he decided to consecrate the place where stillborn children had been buried at the time. While he was doing so, one of the people present stepped forward and put a burning candle in the ground, stating that this apparently must be the place where her stillborn child was buried long time ago. She was followed by others and Kerkhof Jonkman then thought it was more appropriate to have a monument erected at this particular place. It would be impossible to reverse the past, but it would be possible to do justice to the grief. A monument would act as a symbol in this respect.⁶²³ In July 2001, the monument was unveiled. At December 28, the catholic day of ‘Innocent children’, Cardinal Simonis paid a visit to the monument. He named this monument: ‘a monument of sorrow and pain, a sign of collective incapacity following narrow views of human beings.’⁶²⁴ The idea of a *mea culpa* of the Roman Catholic Church was not brought up by him, although he declared that if people wished, they could ask their local priest to consecrate the unconsecrated ground.

The monument was consequently indicated to be the ‘first monument to stillborn children’ in the Netherlands, although this cannot be known for certain. The author H. Kok indicates in *Thanatos*, his book on funeral rituals, that a monument to children who died without being baptized was raised at the catholic cemetery in the Dutch town of Zwolle in 1991.⁶²⁵ This monument did not get much attention

⁶²² ‘En dat was het dan! Ik was 22 jaar en liet dat gebeuren, waarvan ik dacht dat het moest gebeuren... Je kwam met lege handen thuis, waar de kinderkamer al opgeruimd was en men ging over tot de orde van de dag,’ Ria Ruyters-Mostard, www.monumentdoodgeborenkindjes.nl, accessed June, 2011.

⁶²³ ‘Deze kinderen zijn naamloos, dat mag niet,’ interview with Jan Kerkhof Jonkman, www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/archief/article/detail/2529428/2000/06/30/Deze-kinderen-zijn-naamloos-dat-mag-niet-.dhtml, accessed August 14, 2013.

⁶²⁴ Kardinaal Simonis: ‘Het vroegere denken over kinderen die ongedoopt stierven,’ in *Op Tocht*, October 2001, www.geschiedenis24.nl/geschiedenis/andere-tijden/afleveringen/2001-2002, accessed August 14, 2013.

⁶²⁵ Kok: *Thanatos* 66.

in the media at the time of erection, and it might very well be that other monuments have been erected without getting any media attention and which have thus remained beyond sight.

The monument in Reutum meant the start of a public debate about the practices around stillborn children at the time.

Since that time, in many other cities and villages, people took the initiative to erect monuments. A number of more than 160 monuments has been mentioned. Most of them have been erected at the premises of graveyards, crematoria, or next to (mainly Roman Catholic) churches.⁶²⁶

5.2 This case study: focus, contexts and setup

5.2.1 Focus and contexts

The focus of this case study will be on parents who kept commemoration of their stillborn child private for a long time, before they decided to commemorate their child in public, for instance at a monument. In line with Casey, they use a monument at a particular place as a 'specific commemorative vehicle' thus sharing their individual memories with a wider audience.⁶²⁷

I will study relevant issues within the individual, social, and ritual context of these parents. These issues, like mourning practices, religious and ritual practices, and medical practices regarding stillborn children in the years 1950-1990, might relate to the erection of monuments and ritual commemorative practices much later, that is to say as of the year 2001.

Three monuments were included, and with regard to the specific matter of burying stillborn children in unconsecrated ground, parents who lived in the province of Noord-Brabant were asked to participate.

5.2.2 Setup of this case study

Three monuments are the focus of attention in this case study:

- Nijmegen, Cemetery Rustoord: Het monument voor het nooit verloren kind,⁶²⁸ dedicated in 2004;
- Roermond, Cemetery Tussen de Bergen: Het monument voor het doodgeboren kind,⁶²⁹ dedicated in 2008;
- Sittard, General Cemetery: Monument Een glimlach kwam voorbij,⁶³⁰ dedicated in 2009.

Apparently, a (postponed) monument constitutes at the time of this research an important element in commemoration practices of parents of a stillborn child. Why do people put so many efforts in the erection of a monument, most of the time, very long after the child died? Deacon Kerkhof Jonkman, already mentioned above, said that it would be impossible to reverse the past and that the only thing

⁶²⁶ PEELEN: Between birth and death; FARO: 'Van een glimlach die voorbij kwam en het stille verdriet'.

⁶²⁷ CASEY: 'Public memory in place and time'.

⁶²⁸ Monument to the never lost child.

⁶²⁹ Monument to the stillborn child.

⁶³⁰ Monument A smile passed.

that could be done was to do justice to the grief. Once the monument has been erected, does it feel that justice has been done and how do parents appreciate the triad of monument, space and commemoration practices?

In total 25 interviews were conducted with parents, initiators to monuments, artists, health care professionals, undertakers, employees of graveyards, representatives of the church and local municipality. The material derived from these interviews serves as background information to this case study. Twelve interviews with parents have been selected for a more in depth analysis, because they were thought to provide information, in particular relevant to the focus of this case study.

I will start with an explanation of the background and beginning of monuments to stillborn children. Bereavement, religious and ritual practices, and medical practices, regarding stillborn children in the years 1950-1990 will be discussed within the context of the start of monuments to stillborn children. The religious issues within the Roman Catholic Church will be discussed with an accent on experiences of catholic parents in the (mainly catholic) province of Noord-Brabant.

Next, the focus will shift to the exploration of the origin and meaning of three monuments in the cities of Nijmegen, Roermond, and Sittard.

The case study will be rounded off with a conclusion on the results.

5.3 The reasons for monuments to stillborn children

5.3.1 Stillborn children

On the subject of rituals around stillborn children, two (recent) studies need mentioning. Jan Bleyen studied rituals, or rather the absence of rituals, and bereavement around stillbirth in Belgium, in particular in Flanders.⁶³¹ Janneke Peelen studied rituals of pregnancy loss and their effect on the 'social rebirth' of these children in the Netherlands.⁶³² Accordingly, their centre of attention seems to be different from this case study, which focuses on the meaning of (postponed) monuments and commemoration practices to parents of stillborn children.

Children who die around birth are usually called 'stillborn' children.⁶³³

In this case study, I will follow the definition of stillbirth as currently used by the Nederlandse Vereniging voor Obstetrie en Gynaecologie (Society of Dutch Obstetricians and Gynaecologists) in their patient education brochure on the loss of a child during pregnancy or during birth. In this brochure, stillbirth is defined as: 'the birth of a child who died during pregnancy (so called *intra uterine* death of

⁶³¹ BLEYEN: 'The materialities of absence after stillbirth'; BLEYEN: *Doodgeboren*.

⁶³² PEELLEN: 'Reversing the past: monuments for stillborn children'; PEELLEN: *Between birth and death*.

⁶³³ BLEYEN: 'The materialities of absence after stillbirth'; PEELLEN: 21-23.

foetus) or around birth.’⁶³⁴ Accordingly, in this research project, stillborn, or in Dutch *levenloos geboren* or *doodgeboren*, children are children who died before, during, or shortly after birth.

5.3.2 Grief and mourning practices over stillborn children

Up to the mid-1980s, health care professionals like doctors, midwives, and nurses, determined routines around birth. As a consequence and according to the protocols at the time, stillborn children were immediately taken away after birth. Mothers most often did not get a chance, nor were they allowed seeing their child. Fathers sometimes were able to catch a glimpse before the child was taken away.

Gynaecologists in hospitals were taught during their training that it was best not induce emotions by acquainting the parents with their stillborn child, because it would be more difficult for them to handle their loss once they had become attached, seen, and held their child. Other doctors, like general practitioners, who attended deliveries at the residences of parents, adopted these routines. Linda Layne in her account on pregnancy loss in America cites Michael Berman, who reports in *Parenthood loss: healing the pain after miscarriage, stillbirth and infant death* that he was instructed during his obstetrical training in the 1970s

‘that if a child was stillborn or with a serious, “unsightly” birth defect, the physician should attempt to protect the parents from the “shock” of seeing their dead child by covering it with a blanket, quickly removing it from the delivery area, and sending the body to the morgue to be buried in an unmarked grave.’⁶³⁵

The words of Ria Ruyters-Mostard about her stillborn child, ‘and that was it’, as clarified in the introduction of this case study, indicate that parents were not openly allowed to grieve, and they were almost ‘forced’ to ‘deny’ and ‘ignore’ their stillborn child as if it had not existed at all. Health care professionals, as well as family and friends, thought it was best to silence the stillborn child. It was also thought that the loss would be less when it happened early in pregnancy. Miscarriages and stillborn children were not considered to be subject to mourning or to coping with loss. If the child also had some kind of defect, it was not thought to be a ‘real’ child, but more considered to be a ‘medical complication’.⁶³⁶

The first, general, scientific account of the psychological management of bereavement and grief, appeared in literature in 1944.⁶³⁷ At the end of the 1960s, for the first time attention was given to the process of grieving of stillborn children.⁶³⁸ In the Netherlands, the first results on scientific research

⁶³⁴ www.nvog.nl/voorlichting/NVOG+Voorlichtingsbrochures/default.aspx, Het verlies van een kind tijdens de zwangerschap of rond de bevalling, par. 2.1: Doodgeboorte, accessed August 14, 2013.

⁶³⁵ LAYNE: *Motherhood lost* 223.

⁶³⁶ LOVELL: ‘Some questions of identity: miscarriage, stillbirth and perinatal loss’.

⁶³⁷ LINDEMANN: ‘Symptomatology and management of acute grief’.

⁶³⁸ BOURNE: ‘The psychological effects of stillbirths on women and their doctors’.

concerning the best way to take care of parents of stillborn children, were published in the 1980s.⁶³⁹ It was at that time that health care professionals started to be aware of the fact that the relationship and bonding between a parent and a child already started before birth. New approaches were developed to take care of the parents and their stillborn child, and the parents were informed about them through patient education materials.⁶⁴⁰ It was advised not to take away the child immediately after birth. Immediate confrontation and acquaintance with their child became part of the mourning process. It meant that parents were allowed to see their child, to hug it, and to take care of it. Organizing a funeral with accompanying rituals became also part of the bereavement and mourning process. Coping with the loss should be done by going through remembrances of the child. For that reason, it was considered important to actually ‘create’ remembrances in the short time between the child’s birth and its funeral. Nowadays, pictures are made, footprints or a piece of hair is kept, all matters to realize at a later time that the child really existed. These are exactly those matters, doctors, midwives, and nurses opposed to until the mid-1980s, because they thought the emotional effects would be counterproductive to the emotional wellbeing of the parents. The loss of a child at birth was considered to be a medical setback instead of a human tragedy.⁶⁴¹

5.4 The role of the Roman Catholic Church: experiences of parents

As of the year 2001, a great number of monuments have been erected in the southern provinces of the Netherlands, Noord-Brabant and Limburg. From way back, these provinces hold a catholic identity.⁶⁴² It is difficult to determine the number exactly, because there is no central organization keeping track of the number. However, Peelen states that in total the number of monuments in the Netherlands must be around 160.⁶⁴³ More than 85% of these monuments, around 135, have been erected at catholic graveyards or near catholic churches in these two provinces. For reasons to explain, the monuments have been erected honouring stillborn children who were buried anonymously at these cemeteries at hideaway places, like under a hedge or at the unconsecrated grounds.⁶⁴⁴

Sometimes, the initiative to a monument has been taken by a group of parents concerned, sometimes by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. Like for instance the monument at the catholic cemetery in Veldhoven, near the city of Eindhoven, which was initiated by representatives of the local catholic church. The monument was designed by a Benedictine monk. The monument symbolizes a woman, holding a child in her arms. Behind the woman, two plates of stone have been placed. On one of these plates a text from the Old Testament has been inscribed: ‘I, the Lord will never forget you.’

⁶³⁹ LAMBERS: ‘Rouw bij perinatale sterfte’; HOHENBRUCK, DE KLEINE, KOLLEE & ROBBROECKX: ‘Rouwverwerking en begeleiding bij het overlijden van pasgeborenen’; KEIRSE: *Eerste opvang bij perinatale sterfte*.

⁶⁴⁰ www.nvog.nl/voorlichting/NVOG+Voorlichtingsbrochures/default.aspx, accessed August 14, 2013.

⁶⁴¹ LOVELL: ‘Some questions of identity: miscarriage, stillbirth and perinatal loss’.

⁶⁴² BERNTS, DE JONG, YAR: ‘Een religieuze atlas van Nederland’ 92-93.

⁶⁴³ PEELEN: *Between birth and death* 51.

⁶⁴⁴ PEELEN: ‘Reversing the past: monuments for stillborn children’ 173-186; FARO: ‘Monumenten voor overleden kinderen’; PEELEN: *Between birth and death*.

The other plate carries a text from the New Testament, an invitation by Jesus: 'Let the children come to me.' The monument was consecrated by a local priest on All Souls 2010.⁶⁴⁵ In this way, representatives of the local parish took the initiative to comfort parents of stillborn children and made an effort to do justice to their grief. Apparently, the rules and regulations of the Roman Catholic Church prohibited parents to commemorate their stillborn children in a comforting manner, something for which it is now felt apologies should be made in order to make good.

Without any doubt, the influence of the Roman Catholic Church on parents of stillborn children has been important. For this reason, I conducted interviews with parents (two widows, one single mother, and one couple) who experienced the loss of their child and were not allowed to have a catholic funeral for their child. My focus during these interviews was on the consequences of not knowing of the



whereabouts of their child, and on the (emotional) impact of burial of the child in unconsecrated ground.

But first I will start with a short introduction on the applicable Roman Catholic rules and regulations on stillborn children.

Sign indicating the place where stillborn ('levenloos geboren kinderen') had to be buried [collection Nederlands Uitvaart Museum 'Tot Zover', Amsterdam; picture Guus Sluiter]

5.4.1 Baptism

The rules of law of the Roman Catholic Church, the Code of Canon Law of 1917, determined that people who had not been baptized could not have a religious funeral.⁶⁴⁶ It may be deduced from this rule of canonical law that people, who had not been baptized, like stillborn children, were not entitled to a grave in the consecrated grounds of a catholic graveyard. Consequently, these little children had to be buried secretly and anonymously in the unconsecrated grounds of the graveyard.

According to catholic religion, baptism is one of the seven holy sacraments. The baptism of little children is the first important catholic ritual moment in their life and their first encounter with the structure of sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. It means a ritual and liturgical practice with symbolic gestures and words, expressing that the child is a child of God and that it may participate in a divine life.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ 'Monument voor vroeg gestorven kinderen', www.ed.nl/regio/eindhoven/monument-voor-vroeg-gestorven-kinderen-1.2092569, accessed August 15, 2013.

⁶⁴⁶ Code of Canon Law 1917; CIC 1239 par. 1.

⁶⁴⁷ LEIJSEN: 'Sacramentologische reflectie op het kinderdoopsel' 266.

In a catholic educational book, which used to be available at the time in every catholic family, it was explained what this baptism meant.⁶⁴⁸ All people are born with the original sin, which they inherited from their original ancestor Adam. As long as they carry this sin on their soul, their soul will not be allowed to enter heaven after death. Consequently, baptism was necessary because without it, it would not be possible to attain salvation. By means of baptism, the original sin would be forgiven.⁶⁴⁹

Catholic parents were expected to make the necessary arrangements and have their children baptized as soon as possible after their birth. For example, in the 1940s and later, a pregnant catholic woman would be expected to pray one of the following specific prayers: 'May I give birth to a living child and may the child not die without being baptized.'⁶⁵⁰

While children who had not been baptized were buried without any ceremony, baptized children were put in their coffin with a 'crown of flowers'. They would have 'the eternal life and be united with God in heaven.'⁶⁵¹ At the time, the body of a little child who had died would be 'adorned' with paper flowers, ties, and ribbons, as shown in the picture. All neighbourhood children would be invited to come and see how nicely 'the crowned little angel laid at rest in his little coffin.'⁶⁵²

Many parents must have been hurt by these 'rules'. On top of the emotions caused by the death of their child, they were touched by the fact that their unbaptized child would not be treated as a 'little angel' and would not have a religious funeral with the accompanying rituals.⁶⁵³



Twin brothers, Leonardus and Petrus Johannes Swinkels,
Aarle Rixtel 1911
[picture Tinus Swinkels, Brabant-Collectie, Tilburg University]

⁶⁴⁸ SCHATTEN: *Familieboek voor onzen tijd tot godsdienstige onderrichting en stichting* 582.

⁶⁴⁹ GEVERS & VAN BELLEGHEM: 'Het doopsel in de nieuwste tijd (1830-1960)' 103-106.

⁶⁵⁰ The so called 'Gebed in gezegende verwachting': 'Moge ik het kind levend ter wereld brengen en moge het niet zonder doopsel sterven'; RONGEN, *De katholieke moeder in haar opgang naar God*, 568; TOP: 'Als de ooievaar komt... Volksculturele facetten van zwangerschap, geboorte en doop (1900-1950)' 124.

⁶⁵¹ LITURGISCHE VEREENIGING IN HET AARTSBISDOM UTRECHT: *Begrafenis voor kleine kinderen*.

⁶⁵² 'Mooi het gekroonde engeltje in zijn kistje lag', DAM: *Oud-Brabants Dorpsleven. Wonen en werken op het Brabantse platteland* 230.

⁶⁵³ CLOET: 'Het doopsel in de Nieuwe Tijd (ca. 1550 - ca. 1800)' 94.

5.4.2 Lay baptism

When the life of the child at birth was endangered, it had to be baptized as soon as possible, because the child had to be alive in order to have it baptized.⁶⁵⁴ It was stated that in case of emergency: ‘everybody may, must, baptize, it is a heavy duty of charity.’⁶⁵⁵ In the hospital, this duty would be taken care of by a (catholic) doctor, midwife, or nurse. It would not be necessary to wait until a priest would have arrived. If it was doubted whether the child was still alive, it could be ‘conditionally’ baptized. A child, who had already died, could not be baptized. If the mother was in peril of death, the baptism of the child should be considered without hesitation.⁶⁵⁶

5.4.3 Unbaptized

If the child died without having received the baptism, according to catholic doctrine but also in popular belief, there would be consequences: it was told that the soul of the child would keep wandering in undefined places, while a baptized child who had died would become an angel near God.⁶⁵⁷

The traditional catholic doctrine regarding this matter was based on the theory of the so called ‘limbo’, which refers to a sort of ‘space in-between’ where these children would go to.⁶⁵⁸ In 2007, the International Theological Commission, one of the Pontifical Commissions of the Roman Curia, explains the concept of ‘limbo’ as follows:

‘A state which includes the souls of infants who die subject to original sin and without baptism, and who, therefore, neither merit the beatific vision, nor yet are subjected to any punishment, because they are not guilty of any personal sin.’⁶⁵⁹

Children who have not been baptized are in a state in which they have no access to the blessings of heaven and the vision of god. Because of their very young age, it is impossible that they have committed any individual sin. It may be assumed that they will go without punishment and will not have to go to hell. However, they will have to remain in this ‘space in-between’. The concept of ‘limbo’ does not have a clear foundation in the bible, but has been used for ages by the Roman Catholic Church as a doctrine.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁴ GEVERS & VAN BELLEGHEM: ‘Het doopsel in de Nieuwste Tijd (1830-1960)’ 103-106.

⁶⁵⁵ S.N.: ‘Het nooddoopsel’.

⁶⁵⁶ ‘Dan denke men aanstonds aan het doopsel’; S.N.: ‘Het nooddoopsel’ 90; GEVERS & VAN BELLEGHEM: ‘Het doopsel in de Nieuwste Tijd (1830-1960)’ 103-106.

⁶⁵⁷ HEIJDEN: *De zorg voor moeder en kind in Noord-Brabant* 29.

⁶⁵⁸ CLOET: ‘Het doopsel in de Nieuwe Tijd (ca. 1550 - ca. 1800)’ 94.

⁶⁵⁹ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION: *The hope of salvation for infants who die without being baptised*, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en, accessed August 15, 2013.

⁶⁶⁰ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION: *The hope of salvation for infants who die without being baptised*, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en, accessed August 15, 2013.

5.4.4 'Baptism of desire'

In the mid-1950s, observance of the rules of baptism became less strict. Many priests began applying the principle of the so called 'baptism of desire', which meant that if they considered the parents of the stillborn child to be 'good catholics', and they would for sure have had their child baptized had it stayed alive, the child could be considered to have received the baptism and thus it was allowed to have the child buried in consecrated ground.

Only in 1983, the Code of Canon Law was changed, and an article was admitted about the burial of unbaptized children: a local priest may allow children, who died without having been baptized, a religious funeral if their parents had the intention to have them baptized.⁶⁶¹

This means that 'officially', as of 1983, stillborn children were allowed to be buried in the consecrated ground. In the period between the mid-1950s and 1983, a burial in consecrated ground depended on local priests and their opinion on the catholic practices, and attitude of the parents with regard to any application of the 'baptism of desire'.

5.4.5 'Abolition' of the concept of 'limbo'

In 2007, the above mentioned Vatican International Theological Commission, published a report on the fate of children who died without being baptized. This report received the approval of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, on January 19, 2007, and accordingly the text could be published.⁶⁶²

The conclusion of this report was as follows:

'The conclusion of this study is that there are theological and liturgical reasons to hope that infants who die without baptism may be saved and brought into eternal happiness, even if there is not an explicit teaching on this question found in Revelation [...] Rather, there are reasons to hope that God will save these infants precisely because it was not possible to do for them that what would have been most desirable – to baptize them in the faith of the Church and incorporate them visibly into the Body of Christ.'

With this conclusion, the Roman Catholic Church officially discarded of the concept of 'limbo'. As a result it is now assumed that God will save these children, exactly because it has not been possible to do what was necessary to do for them, that is, to have them baptized.

⁶⁶¹ Code of Canon Law 1983: CIC 1183 par. 2.

⁶⁶² INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION: *The hope of salvation for infants who die without being baptised*, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en, accessed August 15, 2013.

5.4.6 The Brabant interviews

As explained above, I conducted interviews with catholic parents of a stillborn child who lived in the province of Noord-Brabant at the time their child was stillborn. The objective was to learn more about the impact of the (catholic) context and practices around stillbirth at the time the above described rules and regulations applied. I conducted interviews with parents (two widows, one single mother, and one couple) who experienced the loss of their child and whom were denied to have a funeral for their child for various reasons, but all inspired by Roman Catholic rules and tradition.

Interview with Mrs. A, June 25, 2009

At the moment of the interview, Mrs. A is 83 years old. Her husband died a couple of years ago. She herself comes from a big family: she has 14 brothers and sisters. Her oldest sister was already 19 years old when she was born. They lived in the city of Den Bosch and were all practicing catholics.

She had already given birth to five healthy children when in 1955, at the age of 29, she got pregnant of a sixth. She tells that at six months pregnancy it felt as if something ‘burst’ in her womb. Probably at that time the umbilical cord had gone around the neck of the child and he died. She went to one of the catholic hospitals of Den Bosch where she had to deliver the child:

‘It was a terrible delivery. They had to push on my stomach to get the child out. When he finally came out, he was dead. He had the umbilical cord around his neck, they told me. The doctor and a nun, who was a nurse, told me that they thought it was better if I did not see the child. At that time, you did not dare to ask why. You looked up to doctors and nuns. Maybe we listened too much to them. My husband has regretted that very much, but that is how it was at that time. I was crying a lot and they thought I could not handle it. My husband finally got a glimpse of the child. He told me that it was a boy and that he had beautiful hair and little nails.’⁶⁶³

Mrs. A has never known what happened to the little boy. A nun told her that the boy had received the baptism of desire and had been put in a coffin with a mother who had just died. They were buried at a catholic cemetery: ‘But I doubt that. Could that really be true? Does the family of that mother know that our boy was put in her coffin?’⁶⁶⁴

She had to stay in the hospital for six days, and she was put on a ward with all happy mothers with healthy children. Afterwards, nobody wanted to talk about it anymore. She had another healthy son afterwards. When the children were young, she had been too busy to give it much thought but nowa-

⁶⁶³ ‘Het was een verschrikkelijke bevalling. Ze moesten op mijn buik duwen om het kind eruit te krijgen. Toen hij er uiteindelijk uitkwam, was hij dood. Hij had de navelstreng om zijn nek zitten, vertelden ze me. De dokter en een non, die verpleegster was, dachten dat het beter was als ik het kind niet zou zien. In die tijd durfde je niet te vragen waarom. Je keek heel erg op tegen dokters en nonnen. Misschien luisterden we wel teveel naar hen. Mijn man heeft daar nog veel spijt van gehad, maar dat was toen zo. Ik huilde heel veel en ze dachten dat ik het niet aankon. Mijn man heeft nog een glimp van het kind opgevangen. Hij vertelde mij dat het een jongen was en dat hij prachtig haar en nageltjes had.’

⁶⁶⁴ ‘Maar ik vraag me af of dat zo is. Zou dat echt waar zijn? Weet die familie van die moeder wel dat onze jongen in haar kist was gestopt?’

days she thinks of the little boy a lot. She regrets that they did not give him an official name. Every time she visits her husband's grave, she wonders where the little boy is and she would very much like to know that. She thought that she had coped with the loss, after 56 years, but she starts to cry when she tells me: 'It returns every time, I get very sad and I have to cry even after such a long time. It comforts me a lot that this issue gets much attention now and that I am able to tell you the story. I visited the monument at Orthen,⁶⁶⁵ very nice, it offers support.'⁶⁶⁶

Interview with Mrs. and Mr. B, July 13, 2009

Both Mrs. and Mr. B are 87 years old at the time of the interview. They both originate from large country families. They got married in 1950. In 1951, Mrs. B got pregnant for the first time. At six months pregnancy, she fell off her bike and the child probably died at that time. However, both her doctor and midwife told her that the child might still be alive. They appeared to ignore the fact that something might have happened to the child. At eight months pregnancy, contractions started and the child was born. Mrs. B tells:

'Unfortunately, it had already died and was in a state of decomposition. They would not allow me to see it, but I insisted and they finally let me see it. At night, my husband put the child in a shoe box and he took it to the verger. The verger buried the child under a hedge at the unconsecrated ground of the cemetery. That's how things were at that time. Of course, I was feeling sad. It happened to everybody but you never talked about it.'⁶⁶⁷

In the years after, they got two healthy children and then she got pregnant again. This child, a little girl, was born in the hospital and died soon after birth. Mrs. B tells:

'We called her Annie. Again, they did not want me to see her, but I insisted and I have seen her. This girl had a lay baptism. The nuns took care of the burial. They told me they put her in a coffin with somebody else. We did not worry about anything, it was like that at the time. You had to go on. We were busy at home, there were other children, and we had a successful business. The nuns made us pay for the burial.'⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁵ Orthen is a local cemetery in the city of Den Bosch.

⁶⁶⁶ 'Het komt elke keer weer terug, ik word heel verdrietig en moet erg huilen, zelfs na zo'n lange tijd. Het doet me goed dat dit nu zoveel aandacht krijgt en dat ik mijn verhaal aan je kan vertellen. Ik heb een keer het monument op Orthen bezocht, heel mooi, het biedt steun.'

⁶⁶⁷ 'Helaas was het al overleden en in staat van ontbinding. Ze wilden het me niet laten zien maar ik stond er op dus ik heb het gezien. 's Avonds heeft mijn man het in een schoenendoos gedaan en bij de koster afgegeven. Die heeft het onder de heg in de ongewijde grond bij de begraafplaats begraven. Natuurlijk was ik wel verdrietig maar het was nou eenmaal zo, er werd verder niet meer over gepraat. Het gebeurde bij iedereen.'

⁶⁶⁸ 'We noemde haar Annie. Weer wilden ze haar niet aan me laten zien maar ik heb er op aangedrongen en toen heb ik haar gezien. Dit meisje heeft een nooddoop gekregen. De nonnen hebben voor de begrafenis gezorgd. Ze vertelden mij dat ze haar in een kist bij een ander hadden gedaan. We maakten ons daar geen zorgen over, zo ging dat toen, je moest doorgaan. We hadden het thuis druk, er waren nog andere kinderen en het bedrijf was ook druk. De nonnen lieten ons wel betalen voor de begrafenis.'

In 1960, she got pregnant again. She was not aware that she was expecting twins. The children were born prematurely. They were two boys, both were baptized the day after birth. One of the boys turned sick that evening and died in hospital because of heart failure. They gave him a proper catholic funeral with a Mass of the Angels: 'He has a beautiful little tombstone.'⁶⁶⁹

Their last child, a girl, was born in 1964. During the interview they say that they had six children, apparently they do not 'count' the children who died, but did not have a proper catholic funeral and thus no tombstone at the graveyard.

Both, Mrs. and Mr. B, state that they have accepted the loss of their three children, although they had been sad at the time: it was very normal at the time, every week, a child died somewhere. The church 'ruled' their daily life and they accepted that.

They were present at the dedication of a monument for stillborn children in their village and considered this monument as a kind of 'closing' of the loss of their unbaptized children.

Interview with Mrs. C, July 17, 2009

At the time, Mrs. C lived in a home for orphan girls. In 1969, she met a boy and she got pregnant. They planned to marry and she would have the child in a catholic home for unmarried pregnant women. Due to complications, she had to go to hospital for the delivery of her child. Unfortunately, the child died during a Caesarean section. Her future mother in law got to see the child, but did not allow Mrs. C to see her:

'She told me it would be better if I did not see her, she said that the child was mutilated by the section, although the nurses offered to let me see her. They told me they put her in a coffin with another dead body. I did not have the money to give her a funeral and my parents in law did not want to pay. Nobody told me anything and there was no one to speak to.'⁶⁷⁰

Afterwards, she got two healthy sons. She finally broke up with her husband and she was never really capable to cope with the death of her first child. She regrets the fact that she did not insist to see her. Now she has no material memories of her:

'I kept thinking that maybe she was not dead at all. Maybe they handed her over for adoption? I think this happened before in that home when parents did not want their child. A couple of years

⁶⁶⁹ 'Hij heeft een mooi grafsteentje.'

⁶⁷⁰ 'Ze zei me dat het beter was als ik het niet zou zien, ze zei dat het kind verminkt was door de sectie, maar de verpleegkundigen boden wel aan dat ze haar zouden laten zien. Ze zeiden dat ze haar in de kist bij een ander lijk hadden gelegd. Ik had geen geld voor de begrafenis en mijn schoonouders wilden niet betalen. Niemand vertelde me iets en er was niemand om mee te praten.'

ago, my youngest son wrote a letter to the hospital and asked for the medical file of Peggy. Now I have the proof that she existed and that she died.’⁶⁷¹

Mrs. C does not know any monuments for stillborn children, nor does she have an interest in them; she has her own little ‘monument’ and her own rituals which bring her a lot of comfort. She gets very emotional when she explains: ‘Two years ago, I found this little sculpture: a hand with a little child resting. This is her, or maybe it is me, because of all the parental love I did not get.’⁶⁷² She puts the little statue on the cabinet, next to a sculpture of Joseph, Maria, and Jesus: ‘They watch over Peggy and they will guard her.’⁶⁷³

Peggy played an important role in her life: ‘If I would not have been pregnant, my life would have been very different. November 20, the day she was born, is always a special day, a day for myself. She was not born for nothing.’⁶⁷⁴

Interview with Mrs. D, July 23, 2009

In May 1961, when she was 21 years old, her first daughter, Marion, was stillborn:

‘After nine months pregnancy, I told my husband that I did not feel the child anymore. I thought that was normal and the doctor also told me everything was okay. I had contractions from Tuesday till Thursday, when finally Saturday the child came. But it had already died. They let me see her because it was with us for another hour. I was not allowed to touch her because that was contagious they said. We did not know what to do. The doctor told us to put it in a box. It stood till Monday at the neighbours’ when it was finally buried secretly, like a dog. At the place where they put all stillborn children. My husband did not go, he did not want to leave me alone.’⁶⁷⁵

People in her immediate surroundings did not speak about what had happened: ‘They said that I was still young and that I would have other children. And I did, two girls: Marja and Wendy. My mother

⁶⁷¹ ‘Ik bleef denken dat ze misschien helemaal niet dood was. Misschien hebben ze haar wel voor adoptie afgestaan? Ik denk dat dat wel vaker gebeurde in dat tehuis als ouders het kind niet wilde hebben. Een paar jaar geleden heeft mijn jongste zoon naar het ziekenhuis geschreven en om het medisch dossier gevraagd van Peggy. Nu heb ik het bewijs van haar bestaan en haar overlijden.’

⁶⁷² ‘Twee jaar geleden vond ik dit kleine beeldje: een hand met daarop een klein kindje. Dat is haar, of misschien ben ik het zelf, vanwege alle ouderlijke liefde die ik altijd heb gemist.’

⁶⁷³ ‘Zij kijken naar Peggy en waken over haar.’

⁶⁷⁴ ‘Als ik niet zwanger was geraakt had mijn leven er heel anders uitgezien. 20 november, de dag dat ze geboren is, is altijd speciaal, een dag voor mijzelf. Ze is niet voor niets geboren.’

⁶⁷⁵ ‘Na negen maanden zwangerschap zei ik tegen mijn man dat ik het kindje niet meer voelde. Ik dacht dat dat normaal was. Ook de dokter zei dat alles goed was. Ik heb van dinsdag tot donderdag weeën gehad toen eindelijk op zaterdag het kindje werd geboren. Maar ze was al gestorven. Ze hebben het wel laten zien want het is nog een uur bij ons geweest. Ik mocht het niet vasthouden want dat was besmettelijk zeiden ze. We wisten niet wat we moesten doen. De dokter zei doe het maar in een doosje. Het heeft toen in een doosje bij de burens gestaan en maandag is het in het geniep begraven, als een hond. Op de plek waar alle doodgeboren kinderen begraven zijn. Mijn man is niet meegegaan want die wilde mij niet alleen laten.’

understood me, because she herself had a stillborn child.⁶⁷⁶ She did not hear from the local priest, nor does she know whether the child has received the baptism of desire. Nobody talked about the child anymore.

She feels that, if after all those years, she has not coped with her loss. She has to cry often and also when she is telling her story: 'I do not know exactly where Marion was buried. They indicated the place, but I do not know exactly. I could not hold my little child and I mind that a lot. Also that it did not have a proper coffin but only a box.'⁶⁷⁷

Mrs. D is very disappointed in the Roman Catholic Church and its priests. She thinks that both, she and her husband, were good practicing parishioners, but neither when Marion died, nor when her own husband died did she get any support from them.

She feels very comforted by the monument at the graveyard of Erp. She thinks it is a beautiful place: 'I go there regularly to put flowers, and then I think of her, and also on Marion's birthday.'⁶⁷⁸

5.4.7 Results of the Brabant interviews

Regrets

All parents, except Mrs. and Mr. B, mention the fact that they were not allowed to hold or even see their stillborn child. They have no material memories of their child, which they all regret very much. They blame the (catholic) doctors and nurses (mostly nuns) for not allowing them to attach themselves to their child. On the other hand, they also blame themselves for not having contradicted, and resigning to the situation. This regret still upsets them all, and also at the time of the interview.

Mrs. and Mr. B seem to be an exception. They have accepted the fact that it was the usual practice at the time: it happened to everybody. Although they were sad at the time of the loss of their children, they coped with it and accepted the practices of that time.

Worries

Parents A and C mention that they find it extremely difficult not to know what has happened to their child. They keep worrying and wondering what has happened at the time of the stillbirth: has the child really been buried in a coffin with someone else? They find this hard to believe. The fact that they do not have a place to go to, to visit, and to pay respect to their child, makes it difficult. Even after such a long time, it is difficult to come to terms with the loss. Again, Mrs. and Mr. B are an exception: they believe their child has been buried in a coffin with someone else, and they have no worries about this fact.

⁶⁷⁶ 'Ze zeiden dat ik nog jong was en nog meer kinderen zou krijgen. Ik kreeg nog twee meisjes: Marja en Wendy. Mijn moeder snapte het wel maar die had zelf ook een doodgeboren kindje gehad.'

⁶⁷⁷ 'Ik weet niet precies waar Marion begraven is. Ze hebben de plaats wel aangewezen maar precies weet ik het niet. Ik mocht mijn kindje niet vasthouden en dat vind ik nog steeds heel erg, en ook dat het geen kistje had maar een doosje.'

⁶⁷⁸ 'Ik ga er regelmatig naar toe om bloemen te leggen en dan denk ik aan haar en ook op de verjaardag van Marion.'

Silence and disregard for the stillborn child

Parents A, C, and D mention that they were hurt by the fact that nobody wanted to talk about their stillborn child. Nobody supported them in their grief and they felt that the child was disregarded. Maybe not by their close relatives, but by others, in particular by representatives from the Roman Catholic Church.

Emotions

Parents A, C, and D are still very emotional and they do not seem to have coped with the loss of their stillborn child. Mrs. A mentions that it seems, now that she has become older and life has become 'less' busy, everything, so to say, 'comes back' and causes a lot of emotions. Mrs. D gets very emotional about the disrespect she has felt all the time from the Roman Catholic Church.

Monuments

A place to commemorate seems to bring comfort, either private (Mrs. C) or public (Mrs. D). Public debate also offers support. Also monuments like at Orthen cemetery and Erp are considered as justice being done their children.

They do not make up for all the harm that has been done: Mrs. D still blames the Roman Catholic Church very much for the shame done to her daughter, because of the burial in unconsecrated ground.

5.5 Monuments to stillborn children

5.5.1 The initiative to erect monuments to stillborn children

Parents who were, at the time, not able to see and to bury their stillborn child, have noticed that since that time the opinion on how to act when a child is stillborn, has changed. This may have an effect on their own experiences and emotions, which had to be hidden and were ignored for a long time. Most of these parents have now reached an age that their own children are starting to raise families and this may also affect their own experiences to resurface.

Not only in Reutum, but in many other places in the Netherlands, monuments to honour these stillborn children have been erected since 2001. As of the year 2001, the year of dedication of the monument in Reutum, parents have started to look for fellow-sufferers to share experiences.

According to Peelen, many monuments were also erected at catholic graveyards in the eastern part of the Netherlands. If we have a closer look at the map of the Netherlands in which Peelen has indicated these monuments to stillborn children, it appears that these eastern monuments have all been erected in places in the vicinity of Reutum.⁶⁷⁹ This might be caused by a 'me too' effect on parents in neighbouring places. This aspect will be considered later on in this chapter, when the monuments in the cities of Roermond and Sittard (about 30 kilometres from another) are being discussed.

⁶⁷⁹ PEELLEN: *Between birth and death* 207.

At some places, commemorative activities are organized at the site of the monument.⁶⁸⁰ For instance in Sittard, where a foundation called *Stil verdriet* ('Silent sorrow') has been established. This foundation organizes meetings where parents of stillborn children may meet each other and exchange experiences. One of the often heard questions around these monuments is about what has happened to these stillborn children. Most of the times, the hospital would take care of these children. If the parents were practicing the catholic religion at the time and the child had not been baptized, most probably it would have been put, sometimes by the father, who felt often so angry and ashamed that he never wanted to speak about it again, secretly, in the unconsecrated ground of the cemetery. This fact will be demonstrated by presentation of the information from the interviews which were conducted in the course of this case study. The unconsecrated ground was a piece of land near to the official, consecrated ground where criminals, people who committed suicide, and people who had not been baptized were buried.

Because of all media attention after the dedication of the monument in Reutum, all over the country many facts became evident. Many hospitals, for example, made 'arrangements' with cemeteries. Like in the city of Helmond, as the son of an undertaker, Pieter Lammers, explains.⁶⁸¹ In 2002, he tells his story in the daily journal of the city of Eindhoven. His job was to take care and bury stillborn children in a far-away place of the cemetery: 'The place is crammed with them.' He considers it important that parents are finally informed about the place of burial of their stillborn child.⁶⁸² In the same article, a mother of a stillborn child, Joke Dekkers, tells about the search which took 37 years to find the grave of her daughter Lotte. Because of the publicity this article attracted, the editorial staff and local community authorities got many requests from parents who went through the same and wanted to know what had happened to their stillborn child. In many cases, they were able to indicate what had happened to their children.

Television programs also paid attention, for instance the documentary program *Andere Tijden*, who broadcasted a documentary on the matter of stillborn children on November 21, 2001. Jan and Clara de Vaan told their story in the program: how they had not known for 34 years where their stillborn child had been buried in 1967. With the help of one of the employees of the cemetery in the city of Den Bosch, who happened to have registered in a little notebook all stillborn children and the place of their burial, the place could be found again.⁶⁸³

For a long time, people did not dare to ask questions or to come forward with their emotions, but ever since 2000, like a wave, all over the country, parents who had a stillborn child at the time, stood up and started to ask questions.

⁶⁸⁰ FARO: 'Van een glimlach die voorbij kwam en het stille verdriet'.

⁶⁸¹ For example the hospital Sint Joseph Ziekenhuis in the city of Eindhoven, and the hospital Lambertus in the city of Helmond, SPEELMAN: 'Zoektocht naar de graven van ongedoopte kinderen, het verloren kerkhof'.

⁶⁸² SPEELMAN: 'Zoektocht naar de graven van ongedoopte kinderen, het verloren kerkhof'.

⁶⁸³ TV program 'Andere Tijden', broadcast November 20, 2001, Dossier *Ongewijde aarde*, www.geschiedenis24.nl/geschiedenis/andere-tijden/afleveringen/2001-2002, accessed June 3, 2011.

The matter also received a lot of attention in journals, as is illustrated by the following examples. At the catholic cemetery in the city of Velp, a little field contains the remains of more than 60 little children. A father, also a grandfather, has marked, at his own expense, the field with 60 little plants: one for each child.⁶⁸⁴ In the village of Liempde, in the province of Noord-Brabant, it is known that at least 224 stillborn children have been buried at the local catholic cemetery. Up to 1942, these burials have been registered.⁶⁸⁵ Probably the number will be much higher.

At the general cemetery of the city of Sittard, a proper registration has been kept all the time, however, for years in succession, nobody asked for this registration. Publicity about the newly erected monuments in neighbour city Roermond, and the initiatives to raise a monument in Sittard, completely jumbled up this situation. According to the employees, a stillborn child was buried almost every other day.⁶⁸⁶

After years of (enforced) silence and not knowing about the final resting places, emotions long time hidden, resurface.⁶⁸⁷ The blanket of secrecy of many years on stillborn children has finally been lifted and the matter has become subject to public debate.

5.5.2 Exploration of the meaning of the monuments

As already said in the setup of this case study, three monuments are the focus of attention.

Hereafter, I will present a qualitative research and exploration of the context and meaning of these three monuments. The objective of this exploration is to illustrate why a (postponed) monument constitutes such an important element in commemoration practices of parents of a stillborn child nowadays, and the meaning of the triad of monument, space and commemoration practices.

5.6 Monument voor het nooit verloren kind, Begraafplaats Rustoord, Nijmegen

This monument was erected in 2004 at the cemetery Rustoord in the city of Nijmegen. The initiative was taken by the management of the cemetery upon a question from someone who wanted to know if there was a place of commemoration of stillborn children.

The monument, two meters high, was designed by a regional known sculptor, Ghisleen Bakker, and symbolizes two upright hands which hold the bud of a flower which is about to burst. At the monument the following words are inscribed: *Ons lief kind* ('Our dear child').

Her idea with the monument was that it would be 'enlarged' by means of little blue ceramic 'forget-me-nots.' Parents of stillborn children could 'order' from the sculptor a 'forget-me-not' with their

⁶⁸⁴ LEENEN: 'Eén voor elke baby'.

⁶⁸⁵ www.brabantscentrum.nl/oud_archief_2004/nieuws/0439_ongedoopt.htm, accessed June 3, 2011.

⁶⁸⁶ Personal communication Léon Tonglet, May 2012.

⁶⁸⁷ BLOKLAND: 'Monument voor ongedoopte 'weggestopte' kinderen'.

individual commemorative text.⁶⁸⁸ When the little flower is ready, parents and their family and friends may organize a ritual during which the little ‘forget-me-not’ will be put at the site of the monument.



‘Monument voor het nooit verloren kind’: Begraafplaats Rustoord, Nijmegen (2008)⁶⁸⁹

In 2009, at the 5th anniversary of the dedication, the so called *stadsdichter* (‘poet of the city’) of the city of Nijmegen, Jaap Robben, wrote a poem called *Schemerleven* (‘Life in the twilight’), which was inscribed in a bench, designed especially to be placed near the monument.

In 2008, nine ‘forget-me-nots’ were placed at the monument.

5.6.1 Participants in the research

In 2008, regarding this monument, a letter was sent to parents who participated in the ritual of placing a ‘forget-me-not’ at the site of the monument. This monument was chosen because of the fact that the parents could actively participate in creating a ‘forget-me-not’ and devise their own ritual at the site of the monument. The monument is in this way interactive, meaning that parents are actively invited to pass from private to public commemoration.

The participants could be found with the help of the employees from the Rustoord cemetery. Letters were sent to all known ‘owners’ of a ‘forget-me-not’ at the site of the monument, nine in total at the time.

⁶⁸⁸ De Gelderlander, November 2, 2004: ‘Monument voor vroeg overleden kinderen’.

⁶⁸⁹ ‘Monument to the never lost child,’ Rustoord Cemetery, Nijmegen.

All together four parents agreed to a semi structured interview and gave their consent to anonymous publication of the results. For that reason, their names were left out and letters were placed instead.

The following subjects were discussed during the interviews:

- the past: circumstances of the stillbirth(s);
- commemoration: private and in public by means of the monument;
- the text at the ‘forget-me-not’;
- the meaning and function of the monument.

Interview with Mrs. and Mr. E, February 25, 2008

The first interview was held in February, 2008, with Mrs. and Mr. E. They live in the city of P., which is about 140 kilometers away from Nijmegen. They learned about the monument from a magazine, and although the monument is about 140 kilometers away from their home, they have commissioned the sculptor to create a ‘forget-me-not’. They do not mind that the monument is so far away. At the time, they did not take any effort to find a monument in their neighbourhood.

At the time of the interview, they were waiting for the news that the ceramic flower would have been finished.

For eight years on a row now, they have been trying to have a child. They have been longing for a child ever since they got married in 2000. Finally, Mrs. E got pregnant in the summer of 2007. Unfortunately, she had a miscarriage. This ‘failure’ to start a family puts their marriage under a lot of pressure. They feel that the people in their immediate surroundings do not understand their pain and grief about the miscarriage. They find it difficult to speak about it with their family and friends. Not having a child ‘feels as grief, I had to do something with it.’⁶⁹⁰ They think that nobody acknowledges their sorrow.

Mrs. E explains that she commemorates privately by means of a suitcase in which she put all dear things which remind her of her hopes of having a family. She made a baptismal gown which she also put into the suitcase, and also a picture of a road cross with the words: ‘Believe – Hope – Love’. At regular times, she opens up the suitcase and feels comforted by its content.

The reason of having a ‘forget-me-not’ at the site of the monument is to ‘close this period of trying to start a family.’⁶⁹¹ A second reason is to honour publicly: ‘All those embryos which have been flushed through the toilet.’⁶⁹² Maybe their friends and family will finally understand what it all means to them. The text on the flower, Hope - Happy - Dreams - Future - Emptiness, reflects the state of mind they have gone through during the years they tried to raise a family.

When the ceramic flower has been finished, she and her husband will go together to put it at the monument. Mrs. E will bring a dish with water and floating candles, one for each lost embryo, and the

⁶⁹⁰ ‘Voelt als rouw, daar moest ik iets mee.’

⁶⁹¹ ‘Om deze periode van het proberen een kind te krijgen af te sluiten.’

⁶⁹² ‘Om alle embryo’s die door het toilet zijn gespoeld te eren.’

candle which burned at their wedding ceremony. Her husband will bring a white rose. They will make pictures which they will hang in their sitting room afterwards. Each year they will visit the monument. They consider the ritual at the monument as a moment of closing: 'The monument is a closing off the period in which we were trying to start a family.'⁶⁹³



Hope - Happy - Dreams - Future - Emptiness

Interview with Mrs. and Mr. F, February 27, 2008

After three miscarriages, Mrs. F finally got pregnant in 1988. Unfortunately, at 24 weeks of pregnancy, the deliverance started. In the hospital they tried to postpone the deliverance till the 25th week of pregnancy. They were told that at 25 weeks pregnancy, life saving measures could be taken. Unfortunately, deliverance could not be stopped and their daughter Anne-Marie was born. She lived for 20 minutes, but was taken away immediately after birth. They did not see her alive. After she had died, she was put in a cradle at the site of Mrs. F's hospital bed.

The hospital personnel sent a pastor to talk to them: 'Nobody dared to talk to us and ask what and how we wanted to have it.'⁶⁹⁴ They did not report their daughter to the local community office and they consented to a mass cremation. They have no idea how and when she was cremated and what was done with her ashes. They regret this decision: 'We were both in shock, overwhelmed, and taken by surprise by the pastor who said that a burial would be too expensive.'⁶⁹⁵

The doctor gave them two Polaroid pictures of their little girl: 'We had not asked him to take pictures, but he had done so anyhow, he had tears in his eyes when he handed them to us.'⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ 'Het monument is een afsluiting van de periode waarin we getracht hebben kinderen te krijgen.'

⁶⁹⁴ 'Niemand durfde met ons te praten en te vragen wat en hoe we het wilde hebben.'

⁶⁹⁵ 'We waren allebei in shock, verpletterd en overrompeld door de priester die zei dat begraven te duur zou worden.'

⁶⁹⁶ 'We hadden hem niet gevraagd foto's te maken maar hij had het toch gedaan. Hij had tranen in zijn ogen toen hij de foto's aan ons gaf.'

They sent out cards to inform family and friends. They talked a lot with their family minister and asked him: ‘Why does God do this? The minister answered that he honestly did not know.’⁶⁹⁷ Their faith helped them a lot, especially because their girl had been born only a couple of days short of the time that the doctors would have started to try to keep her alive. But on the other side: ‘What would have come over her?’⁶⁹⁸

In 2009, Mrs. F got pregnant again and a healthy son was born, and three years later, another son was born. Many years later they started to wonder: ‘How would she have looked like? How would life have been with a girl? But then Stephan would not have been there.’⁶⁹⁹

They lacked a place to go to and commemorate her. When they read about the monument at Rustoord, they decided to have a ‘forget-me-not’, in remembrance of their daughter Anne-Marie.

It was difficult to decide on the text that would have to go on the ‘forget-me-not’: ‘We had too much text, it did not fit on the ‘forget-me-not’.’⁷⁰⁰ Her name and date of birth and death was put on the flower, as well as the names of her brothers, Stephan and Vincent, and a message that she would not be forgotten: ‘forever in our hearts’.



Anne-Marie Charlotte
Forever in our hearts
04-04-1988
Dad and Mom
Stephan Vincent

Together with their minister and their sons, the little flower was put at the site of the monument. Now they visit this place with their family every two months: ‘It is very important that she has her own

⁶⁹⁷ ‘Waarom doet God dit? De dominee antwoordde eerlijk dat hij het ook niet wist.’

⁶⁹⁸ ‘Wat zou haar dan zijn overkomen?’

⁶⁹⁹ ‘Hoe zou ze eruit hebben gezien? Hoe zou het met een meisje zijn geweest, ja maar dan was Stefan er niet geweest.’

⁷⁰⁰ ‘We hadden teveel tekst, het paste niet op de vergeetmijnt.’

place now. It is important to us, not to our social environment; we do not feel the need to involve them.’⁷⁰¹

Interview with Mrs. G, March 6, 2008

In 1976, almost 32 years ago, Mrs. G gave birth to a little boy, Merijn. The child was born at 24 weeks of pregnancy. She herself was 21 years old at the time Merijn was born. Both, she and her husband, were catholic and the child was born in a catholic hospital in Nijmegen. When the child was born at 6.30 hours in the morning, she heard no noise and he was immediately taken away from her. Later on, a doctor came to tell her that they had given the child a so called ‘lay baptism’. In the evening, her husband was told that Merijn had died.

Her sister, who was many years older than she was at the time, worked as a nurse at the same hospital. She took care of everything. She had Merijn buried at a local cemetery. Mrs. G was not told when and where. Up and till today, she does not know where he is buried: ‘I don’t want to know, let it rest.’⁷⁰² She has not a single remembrance of Merijn, no picture, nothing: ‘I did not get the chance to say goodbye.’⁷⁰³ When she returned home from the hospital, nobody spoke about what had happened:

‘They ignored it. They kept quiet. They told me not to drone on, he did not suffer, and that I should be happy that my sister had arranged everything so neatly. And that I was healthy and could have other children. My husband was not a support to me. I wanted to have Merijn on my marriage certificate, as proof of his existence, but my husband did not want that. He did not want to talk about it anymore. Nobody wanted to talk, not even our priest.’⁷⁰⁴

After two years, she got pregnant again and a son was born. She got three more children afterwards. Sixteen years after the birth and death of Merijn, she saw a movie called *Romeo*, about a couple who had also lost a child at birth. Just like with her own husband, the husband in the movie was not able to mourn together with his wife. Her husband got very emotional when he saw that movie. That made him decide to have Merijn entered into their marriage certificate. All questions came up again: ‘Why wasn’t she allowed to hold him? Why didn’t they make a picture?’⁷⁰⁵ After many years, her gynaecologist made his apologies to her: ‘He said: “That is how things went in those days”’.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰¹ ‘Het is voor ons erg belangrijk dat ze haar eigen plaats heeft. Het is belangrijk voor ons, niet voor onze omgeving, we hebben niet de behoefte om hen erin te betrekken.’

⁷⁰² ‘Ik wil het niet weten, laat het maar rusten.’

⁷⁰³ ‘Ik heb de kans niet gekregen om afscheid te nemen.’

⁷⁰⁴ ‘Zij negeerden het. Het werd doodgezwegen. Ze zeiden dat ik niet moest zeuren, hij had niet geleden en dat mijn zuster het toch allemaal netjes had geregeld, daar moest ik blij om zijn. En dat ik nog jong was en andere kinderen kon krijgen. Ik wilde Merijn in mijn trouwboekje hebben als bewijs van zijn bestaan maar mijn man wilde dat niet. Hij wilde er niet meer over praten. Niemand wilde erover praten, zelfs onze pastoor niet.’

⁷⁰⁵ ‘Waarom had ze hem niet mogen vasthouden? Waarom hebben ze geen foto gemaakt?’

⁷⁰⁶ ‘Hij zei: “Zo ging dat toen in die tijd”.’

Later on, and also because of this complicated relationship regarding Merijn, she decided to break up with her husband and also with her family.

Because for years and years, Merijn had been completely ignored by her social environment, she feels that she did not get the chance to have a proper mourning process about his loss.

When she read in the newspapers about the initiative to raise a monument at the Rustoord cemetery, she thought it was a great idea. She attended the dedication ceremony and decided to have a 'forget-me-not' made because she wanted something 'tangible' regarding Merijn. Her former husband wanted to split the costs, but she decided that she would pay the 160 Euros all by herself. He paid half anyhow, and she decided to go out to dinner from this money.

The text on the monument is dedicated to Merijn, like a farewell message: 'Dear Merijn 25-04-1976. The first life from me was you. Like a wonderful little butterfly you flew away from me.' The message describes how her wonderful first born son came into her life but at the same time left her without any trace.



Dear Merijn 25-04-1976
The first life from me was you
Like a wonderful little butterfly you flew away from me

Together with her four children she laid down the little 'forget-me-not'. They also laid flowers. She thinks it is a wonderful place, although she does not appreciate the monument itself very much because of the vertical hands. She appreciates that they have put little benches to sit on and reflect. The 'forget-me-not' has brought her a lot of ease: 'I had never been released of my grief, never, not one day. Now I have. It is okay.'⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁷ 'Ik ben nooit losgekomen van mijn verdriet, nooit, niet één dag. Nu wel. Het is goed.'

This conversation brings back memories and emotions. She has been dreaming about Merijn, but she does not mind, she is able to handle it now.

Interview with Mrs. and Mr. H, March 14, 2008

Although Mr. H is present at the beginning of the interview, they tell me that only Mrs. H will participate. Mr. H explains that he thinks that his wife might be inhibited in telling the full story by his presence, and he then leaves the room. They have mutually agreed that Mrs. H will tell their story. Mr. H knows what she is going to tell and says that he holds the same opinion on what she will tell.

In 1970, 38 years ago, their son Robje was born. The delivery took place at their home. Immediately after birth, Rob was taken away and brought to the hospital: ‘The midwife took him away right before my eyes.’⁷⁰⁸ Mrs. H did not get a chance to see her son, her husband managed to catch a glimpse. Robje was taken to a children’s hospital. Three days later they were notified that their son had passed away. They were asked if they would agree to have him ‘made available for scientific research’.⁷⁰⁹ Mrs. H explains: ‘We agreed. That is how it went at that time. You did not dare to say no to a doctor. I was only 24 years old at the time.’⁷¹⁰ It appeared that Robje had suffered from severe brain damage and had no chance of surviving.

They were given no chance, neither to say good-bye, nor to see their son. The moment he entered their life, he also disappeared. There had been no notice of the death of Robje. People did not dare to approach them and ask them what had happened: ‘They distanced themselves from us.’⁷¹¹

Ever since that time, Mrs. H has been wondering ‘where he is, I feel he is floating around somewhere. He is not in his rightful place.’⁷¹² At the time there was no counselling at all, they had to cope themselves, which was very hard, they felt very much left alone. Mrs. H was often very weepy. Her family doctor said that this had to do with an ‘unfinished mourning process with regard to Robje.’⁷¹³ Another health care professional brought the monument at Rustoord to their attention. Whilst they are living in Nijmegen, the monument is not far away from their home. In 2006, they decided to have a ‘forget-me-not’ made in honour of Robje.

The text on the flower refers to the fact that only the memory remains: ‘Robje. The memory lingers on. 20-3-1970, 23-3-1970.’ Mrs. and Mr. H devised a ritual placement of the flower at the site of the monument. Together with their children, they burned candles and put flowers down. Pictures were taken which are now put in an album. Mrs. H has written a poem as an introduction to this memorial photo album. On Robje’s birthday they visit the monument: ‘A beautiful place.’⁷¹⁴

⁷⁰⁸ ‘De vroedvrouw haalde hem voor mijn neus weg.’

⁷⁰⁹ ‘Beschikbaar te stellen voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek.’

⁷¹⁰ ‘We stemden toe. Zo ging dat in die tijd. Je durfde geen nee tegen een dokter te zeggen. Ik was pas vierentwintig jaar toen.’

⁷¹¹ ‘Men liep met een grote boog om ons heen.’

⁷¹² ‘Waar hij is, ik voel dat hij ergens rondzweeft.’

⁷¹³ ‘Een niet afgemaakt rouwproces met betrekking tot Robje.’

⁷¹⁴ ‘Een mooie plaats.’

It has been an important ritual for Mrs. H: 'I feel more at ease now, I do not wonder all the time where he is. However, I think I would like to know what they have done with him. Maybe, I will call the hospital one day and see if I can find out.'⁷¹⁵



Robje
The memory remains
20-3-1970
23-3-1970

5.6.2 Results of the Rustoord interviews

Regrets

In line with the results of the Brabant interviews, parents regret that they were not allowed to see or hold and attach to their stillborn child. They regret that they did not stand up against this practice and keep wondering about the reasons. They regret that, because of this practice they do not have any 'tangible' memory of their stillborn child.

Worries

Parents still wonder what has happened to their child. This refrains them from being able to 'close' the period of bereavement. Mrs. H, who agreed to a request to scientific research on her stillborn child, regrets this decision, because she keeps wondering where her child is and what has happened to him. Mrs. G realizes that it does not help to keep wondering about the whereabouts of her child and tries not to be worried about it.

⁷¹⁵ 'Ik voel me nu meer gerust. Ik vraag me niet de hele tijd af waar hij is. Toch denk ik dat ik wel zou willen weten wat er met hem gebeurd is. Misschien bel ik het ziekenhuis wel een keer om te zien of ik daar achter kan komen.'

Silence and disregard

All of the parents mention that they felt that their stillborn child was ‘silenced and disregarded’ by their social environment. Their sorrow was not acknowledged and they felt they were not supported in their grief.

Emotions

The parents still feel regrets, often have worries about the whereabouts of their child, and feel ignored and disregarded in their grief for their stillborn child. All parents are still very emotional about the loss. They all mention that they did not have an appropriate mourning process regarding their stillborn child, and that this is the reason they still react very emotionally.

Commemoration ritual at the monument

Mrs. and Mr. E are in particular in need of a public sign of commemoration, because keeping it privately does not ‘help’. The monument is considered to be a public acknowledgement of their private and disregarded sorrow. At the same time, the commemoration ritual at the monument means for them the closing of a period in which they tried to raise a family, a very emotional and disappointing time in their life.

Mrs. and Mr. F are in need of a place to go to, instead of a grave, for commemoration practices. There is no need to involve others, the commemoration ritual at the monument is just meant for the family.

Mrs. G uses the monument as a farewell ritual to cope with the loss, because now she has something tangible of her little son, a public place to visit. Mrs. H holds the same opinion, although she keeps wondering what has happened to her child after she handed him over for scientific research. She says that maybe, some day, she will call the hospital and find out.

With respect to all participants in the interviews, the commemoration ritual of designing and placing their own particular ‘forget-me-not’ in remembrance of their stillborn child, appears to be effective, even long time after the stillbirth, in the coping process of the loss.

The monument in 2013

After the celebration of the fifth anniversary, no other ‘events’ have been organized at the site of the monument. At guided tours of the cemetery, the monument is visited and explained to visitors. In 2013, at the time of writing this thesis, only one additional ‘forget-me-not’ had been put at the site of the monument.

Occasionally, parents are seen who pass by the monument to pay respect to their ‘forget-me-not’.⁷¹⁶

In the opinion of the employees of the cemetery, the monument is at the moment not very much ‘alive’. Although they tried to attract more attention, they think they were not successful. A remarkable fact they noticed is, that they are regularly asked by brothers and sisters whether their stillborn

⁷¹⁶ Personal communication Begraafplaats Rustoord, August 9, 2013.

brother or sister has been buried at the cemetery. Sometimes they were told by people that, at the death of their parents, papers concerning a stillborn child were found. Until this moment, these family members had never known about their stillborn brother or sister. These children have probably been buried in a specific section, which has now been restored and is considered to be integrated with the monument into one commemorative place.



Monument voor het nooit verloren kind, Begraafplaats Rustoord, Nijmegen (2013)⁷¹⁷
[picture Roy ten Holder]

5.7 Monument voor het doodgeboren kind, Roermond

5.7.1 Monuments in the city of Roermond

In 2010, I was invited to give a presentation about my research project at a yearly meeting of the Roermondse Vrouwenraad (Roermond Women's Council) about the meaning of monuments for stillborn children. At this occasion, they had also organized a commemoration at the monument to stillborn children at the Oude Kerkhof (Old Cemetery).

This monument had been unveiled at June 18, 2008. The monument consists of a simple stone with the following text inscribed: *Nooit gekende schoonheid* ('Never known beauty'). A small butterfly was engraved next to the text. The initiative had been taken by the women's council, because they wanted

⁷¹⁷ 'Monument to the never lost child,' Rustoord Cemetery, Nijmegen.

to create a place of commemoration to all those parents who had ‘lost’ their child in the unconsecrated ground of the graveyard.

At the same day, June 18, 2008, another monument was unveiled at a second cemetery in Roermond: Het monument voor het doodgeboren kind (Monument to the stillborn child) at the cemetery Tussen de Bergen in Roermond. This monument was designed as a boat, made of bronze, ‘sailing through the gate of heaven’. The boat symbolizes the parents of stillborn children. So called ‘stones of thought’, symbolizing the children, may be put into the monument.

Having two monuments, Roermond seemed to be an interesting place for this research project.

Het monument voor het doodgeboren kind seemed of particular interest to investigate, because of the interactive elements which are integrated into the *herdenkingsplaats* (‘commemorative place’) as the designers have called the monument and its location at the public cemetery Tussen de Bergen.

It was my objective to invite parents who had placed a ‘stone of thought’ to participate in the project. Below I will describe the results of my efforts.

5.7.2 Initiative to the monument

The initiative to this monument was taken in 2006 by Betsy Muler-Kouters. In the month of May of that year, she wrote a letter to the director of the local hospital, the Laurentius Ziekenhuis.⁷¹⁸ In this letter she explained that recently she had been talking a lot with her parents, both 86 years old, about their stillborn son who was born in 1964. He was the last of 14 pregnancies of her mother. She had five miscarriages, one child died at six weeks, and seven children were still alive. Now that her parents had become older, Mrs. Muler noticed that they were more and more wondering what had happened at the time to their last, stillborn boy. The only thing they still could remember is that he was immediately taken away and that they only caught a glimpse of him. Her father had run after the doctor and asked if he could be baptized. They have never known whether this has happened. Nor were they told what happened to the body. Even after all that time, it kept them busy a lot and they were still very emotional.

In her letter to the director, Mrs. Muler asked whether he was able to retrieve information from the medical archives on the little boy and about what had happened to his remains.

In his answer, the director of the Laurentius Ziekenhuis explained that unfortunately all medical files of that period had been destroyed, due to legal regulations which allowed them to do so. At that time, the general procedure regarding stillborn children was that these children would be cremated. But due to the long period of time, much information on the exact procedures had been lost.

In her answer, Mrs. Muler suggested that the hospital would initiate a ‘place of commemoration’ regarding all those stillborn children who had been cremated by the hospital without any proper funeral ritual and without informing the parents. Mrs. Muler suggested, that the 75th anniversary of the

⁷¹⁸ Personal communication Betsy Muler-Kouters, June 26, 2011, documentation in possession of researcher. Mrs. Muler consented in publishing these data and in publishing her name.

hospital that year, would be the right moment to make good what the hospital had done to all those parents, and also to make a new start for the upcoming 75 years.

This proposal was adopted by the hospital management, and on June 18, 2008, at the same day the other Roermond monument was unveiled in the morning, the dedication ceremony of the monument took place in the afternoon.



Het monument voor het doodgeboren kind, Begraafplaats Tussen de Bergen, Roermond⁷¹⁹
[picture Laurentius Ziekenhuis, Roermond]

As said, the monument belongs to a place of commemoration which is intended to be interactive. The artists, father Dick van Wijk (1943)⁷²⁰ and daughter Coco-Susanne van Wijk (1981), designed a monument in which parents and other people involved, may actively contribute by putting a so called ‘stone of thought’ into the monument. These stones are blown of glass and may have an individually designed inscription with a maximum of ten words. A variety of stones with different colours has been designed between which people may choose. The monument and its location symbolize an imaginary ‘landscape of thoughts’. The monument is made up of three parts:

- the ‘stones of thought’, symbolizing the children;
- a ‘boat’ made of bronze, symbolizing the parents;
- a ‘gate’, symbolizing the gate of the hereafter.

⁷¹⁹ Picture and monument are property of the Laurentius Ziekenhuis, Roermond.

⁷²⁰ Dick van Wijk also designed the Nationaal Indië-monument 1945-1962 in Roermond.

One of the artists, Coco-Susanne van Wijk, explains that the ‘stones of thought’ will be put into the boat, thereby symbolizing the parents who will carry their children through the gate of the hereafter, a journey they will make together. When the sun will be shining on the boat, through the holes of the boat, the stones will twinkle in the light as if the children are dancing in the sunlight, embraced by their parents. The monument symbolizes the long road of parents who have grieved so much about the loss of their children.⁷²¹ A commemorative inscription at the foot of the monument bears the following inscription: *Fonkelend in het licht. In een landschap van gedachten* (‘Twinkling in the light. In a landscape of thoughts’).

At the dedication ceremony, six ‘stones of thought’ were put into the boat.

The first one was put by Mrs. Betsy Muler-Kouters, who had taken the initiative to the monument in 2006, on behalf of her parents and brothers and sisters. Unfortunately, her father had already died and her mother was unable to attend due to physical problems. However, Mrs. Muler informed me that her father had known about her initiative and the response of the hospital. He appreciated that very much.⁷²² Together with her brothers and sisters they thought of an inscription to put on the stone. They also had to think of a name, because their parents never had the chance to give their stillborn son a name. They named him Benjamin because he had been their youngest brother. Because his death was considered as the ‘cause’ of the monument, they decided on the following text: ‘Your stillbirth has not been meaningless for everything has a reason.’⁷²³ One of the sisters of Mrs. Muler, Door Jacobs-Kouters, says:

‘The most wonderful thing of that day was when at the dedication ceremony a little girl sang “Heaven”. At that moment there was a little breeze and little blossom flowers fell down on all people present. It was just like a sign from heaven, sent by all those little children from that time as if they sent us a message that they were all well. That could not be a coincidence. Very, very nice!! It was very emotional. I often have to think about it and then I say: Goodbye little brother, I have never seen you but this was well done by you.’⁷²⁴

After the ceremony, they gave their mother a detailed report on the event. She was touched, and it clearly seemed to do her well, according to Mrs. Muler-Kouters.

⁷²¹ LAURENTIUSZIEKENHUIS: ‘Herdenkingsplaats voor doodgeboren kinderen’.

⁷²² Interview with Mrs. Muler-Kouters, August 1, 2011.

⁷²³ ‘Benjamin Kouters 1 augustus 1964. Jouw doodgeboorte was niet zinloos, want alles heeft een reden.’

⁷²⁴ Personal communication Door Jacobs-Kouters, July 31, 2011: ‘Het allermooiste die dag vond ik toen een meisje van 12 jaar het lied Heaven zong, op dat moment volop zon, en toen waaide er een briesje en viel er allemaal bloesem op de aanwezige mensen, rechtstreeks vanuit de hemel. Net of de kleine mensjes van toen wilden zeggen dat ze goed terecht waren gekomen. Dit kon geen toeval zijn. Heel heel mooi!! Ik vond dit heel emotioneel en moet daar nog vaak aan denken en dan zeg ik, dag kleine broertje, ik heb je nooit gezien, maar dit heb je mooi gedaan.’

Apart from this place of commemoration at the cemetery, a website was developed: www.monumentdoodgeborenkinderen.nl.⁷²⁵ At this website, information is presented about the meaning of the place of commemoration and also information is given about the ordering of stones.

5.7.3 Finding participants to the research

In 2011, I made efforts to trace the names of parents who had laid a ‘stone of thought’. At the dedication ceremony, six stones were put into the monument:

- One stone was put in by Mrs. Muler-Kouters in remembrance of her brother Benjamin with the following inscription: ‘Benjamin Kouters August 1 1964. Your stillbirth has not been meaningless for everything has a reason.’⁷²⁶
- A second stone bears the following inscription: ‘Thousands silent tears, forever in my heart.’⁷²⁷
- A third stone has the following inscription: ‘Johannes 18-10-1956, Marietje 21-6-1957, With love in our heart.’⁷²⁸
- A fourth stone was placed by the city council of Roermond with the following inscription: ‘In memory of all who never saw the light of day.’⁷²⁹
- A fifth stone was placed by the Laurentius Ziekenhuis with the following inscription: ‘In memory of the grief.’⁷³⁰
- A sixth stone was put in by children from a local elementary school with the following inscription: ‘You could have been my classmate.’⁷³¹

I asked the hospital if they could assist me in getting in touch with these people and ask them if they would agree to an interview. Due to privacy regulations, the hospital stated that they were not able to do so. Instead, they helped me with a publication in a local newspaper. I had an interview with a journalist from a regional newspaper who published an article in which I was able to make a call for participants.⁷³² I got a lot of reactions, very emotional letters of parents from all over the country, who all had lost one, or sometimes several children during birth and who had, for several reasons, not been able to see, hold, or bury their child.

Only Mrs. Muler-Kouters and her sister responded to my call. Unfortunately, none of the parent(s) who had put a stone into the monument responded.

⁷²⁵ www.monumentdoodgeborenkinderen.nl, accessed August 2, 2013.

⁷²⁶ ‘Benjamin Kouters 1 augustus 1964. Jouw doodgeboorte was niet zinloos, want alles heeft een reden.’

⁷²⁷ ‘Duizend stille tranen, voor altijd in mijn hart,’ I was not able to trace the people who put the stone in the monument.

⁷²⁸ ‘Johannes 18-10-1956 Marietje 21-6-1957 Met liefde in ons harte,’ I was not able to trace the people who this stone in the monument.

⁷²⁹ ‘In nagedachtenis aan allen die het levenslicht nooit zagen.’

⁷³⁰ ‘Ter herinnering aan het verdriet.’

⁷³¹ ‘Je had best mijn klasgenootje kunnen zijn.’

⁷³² BUITENHUIS: ‘Monument van verdriet’.



Indirectly, I was able to trace one mother who had ordered a stone but, for reasons to explain, did not put it into the monument. She agreed to an interview which took place on March 25, 2011. She agreed to anonymous publication of the data, I will therefore continue in calling her ‘Mrs. I’.

‘Stones of thought’ in ‘Monument voor het doodgeboren kind’
Begraafplaats Tussen de Bergen, Roermond⁷³³

Interview with Mrs. I, March 25, 2011

Background

At the time of the interview in 2011, Mrs. I was 79 years old. Her husband died a couple of years ago. They were married in 1951. In 1952 her first child, a girl, was born. In 1954, she got pregnant again. At six months pregnancy, at the second day of Christmas, the child, a girl, was born in the Laurentius Ziekenhuis in Roermond. Mrs. I heard her cry: ‘I heard her cry and it was very nice because most of the times you are not allowed to see the child. But there was a very nice nun who said to me: you must have a look. And then they took it away, crying.’⁷³⁴ The next day they were told by a young nurse that the child had died. Nobody offered comfort or support. She was in a ward with other mothers who had all healthy children: ‘I was very jealous of them and I was mad at myself because my body had rejected my child.’⁷³⁵ They were not allowed to see the child again to say goodbye, nor were they told what happened to her.

They were not catholic, so there was no discussion whether the child would have been baptized. After she got home again, nobody spoke about what happened. In 1957, a son was born and in 1960 she got another daughter.

⁷³³ Picture and monument are property of the Laurentius Ziekenhuis, Roermond.

⁷³⁴ ‘Ik hoorde het huilen en ik vond het heel mooi want meestal mag je het niet zien, maar ik had een hele lieve non en die zei: kijkt u nu even... en toen werd het huilend bij me weggehaald.’

⁷³⁵ ‘Ik was erg jaloers op hen en ik was boos op mijzelf dat mijn lichaam het kind had afgestoten.’

Emotions

For years, Mrs. I has been wondering what happened to the child and why they were not allowed to say goodbye to her: 'It is so cruel, because you feel like a mother to her, it was very much wanted. I have seen it, a moment; it had a lot of hair and the forehead of my husband.'⁷³⁶ She had wanted very much to say goodbye to her:

'When I heard her cry, it was a sign to me that she wanted to stay with me, but they took her away. I was not able to hold her, neither when she had died, nor give her a little kiss. To say goodbye to someone who died: do it, do it, because it will bother you forever if you don't. That feeling will stay with you forever. You had to let the child go, they took it away from you. Just like you did not want the child.'⁷³⁷

Her husband never wanted to talk about the child and she does not know why:

'Maybe my husband has seen her [...] I have been looking for years to find out what happened to her and where she was... at the churchyard? Maybe he knew what happened to her, he did not want to talk about it although he knew I felt so sad. I wondered why he did not want me to talk about it. Where is that child? He thought you should not speak about these things [...] The only person I could speak to was my mother. My mother went through the same, she also had a stillborn child, but she lived far away and we did not have a telephone at the time.'⁷³⁸

They told her that if her stillborn child would not be spoken about, her grief would be less: 'They said all the time: if you keep quiet about it, you will have less distress.'⁷³⁹

She also feels uncomfortable about the feelings she had at the time towards mothers with healthy, living children, and also because nowadays everything has been so well organized when you have a stillborn child: 'For years I have been at odds with myself because of my feelings at the time, I had remorse.'⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁶ 'Het is zo wreed want je hebt zulke moederlijke gevoelens en het kindje was zo gewenst. Ik heb het heel even gezien, het had veel haartjes en het voorhoofd van mijn man.'

⁷³⁷ 'Toen ik haar hoorde huilen was dat een teken voor mij dat ze bij mij wilde blijven maar ze haalden haar weg. Ik heb haar niet vast kunnen houden, ook niet toen ze was overleden. Want afscheid nemen van een dode, nou ik zeg het je: doe dat, doe dat vooral want je hebt er anders altijd last van. Dat gevoel gaat nooit over. Je hebt het los moeten laten, het is weggehaald bij je. Net of je het kindje niet wilde.'

⁷³⁸ 'Misschien heeft mijn man haar gezien [...] Ik heb jaren gezocht en geprobeerd uit te vinden wat er met haar gebeurd is en waar ze is gebleven... op het kerkhof? Misschien wist hij wat er met haar gebeurd was. Hij wilde er niet over praten terwijl hij wist dat ik zo verdrietig was. Ik vroeg me af waarom dat was. Waar is dat kindje? Hij vond dat je over zulke dingen niet moest praten [...] Ik kon alleen met mijn moeder erover praten. Zij heeft het zelf ook meegemaakt. Maar zij woonde ver weg en we hadden toen nog geen telefoon.'

⁷³⁹ 'Ze zeiden de hele tijd als je het er niet meer over hebt dan zul je minder last er van hebben.'

⁷⁴⁰ 'Ik heb jaren met mezelf geworsteld over mijn gevoelens toen, gewetenswroeging had ik.'

The monument

She learned about the monument by an article in a local newspaper and she attended the dedication ceremonies of both monuments. Her daughter accompanied her and she enjoyed the ceremonies very much: 'I walk around the cemetery once in a while and then I think it would have been nice if there was something to go to. Now there is this monument to visit [...] They should have one at every cemetery.'⁷⁴¹

Her 'stone of thought'

After the dedication ceremony, she decided to have her own 'stone of thought'. She devised the following text: 'Dear child, forever in my thoughts, December 26 1954.'⁷⁴² Although Mrs. I wanted to call the girl Julia, she did not put the name on the stone. Instead of laying the stone in the monument, she took it home and put it next to the picture of her husband:

'I picked it up at the hospital, which was already something of a ritual. It was very neatly packed and when I came home I carefully unpacked it and put it next to the pictures of my husband and a good friend and I told them: Boys, remember, this is a very small child, you will have to take care of it. And in my thoughts I can hear them nod that they agree.'⁷⁴³

The meaning of the monument and the 'stone of thought'

Mrs. I thinks that the symbolism of, what she calls, the 'boat of life' and the gate of heaven is very nice and emotional, but she does not want to have her own stone in the monument. She fears that it may get dirty or that other stones will be put on her own stone: 'Maybe sand will come over it or they will put stones on top of it.'⁷⁴⁴

The ritual of collecting the stone was as if she was collecting her own child from the hospital: 'I was all by myself, on purpose.'⁷⁴⁵ It was something between that little child and me, now it is returning to me.'

Before she had the 'stone of thought', she thought of the child almost every day. Especially on the day of her birth and death, the 26th of December, and now, with the stone:

'I am finally there; I have always had a knot in my body but it has gone. Really. There are many days now that I do not think of it [...] I am now able to close off, just like with your husband, not

⁷⁴¹ 'Ik loop wel eens over het kerkhof en dan denk ik het zou fijn geweest zijn als er iets was om naar toe te gaan. Nu is er het monument [...] Op elk kerkhof zou eigenlijk een monument moeten zijn.'

⁷⁴² 'Lief kind, voor altijd in gedachten 26 december 1954.'

⁷⁴³ 'Ik ben het in het ziekenhuis gaan ophalen, dat was al een soort van ritueel. Het was heel mooi ingepakt. Ik heb het thuis uitgepakt en bij de foto's van mijn man en een goede vriend gezet en gezegd: Jongens, dit is zo'n klein kindje, jullie moeten er wel opletten. In gedachten zie je ze dan knikken.'

⁷⁴⁴ 'Misschien komt er zand op of leggen ze andere stenen er bovenop.'

⁷⁴⁵ 'Ik was bewust alleen gegaan. Het was iets tussen dat kindje en mijzelf. Nu gaat het weer terug naar mij.'

like you forget them, but it has now settled. It was the same with the little stone, I am very happy with it. I showed it to many people and they all thought it was very nice. Some ask about it when they notice it. It did me well, so did this interview.⁷⁴⁶

Although I was not able to find (more) parents who had put a stone in the monument at the cemetery Tussen de Bergen, two mothers responded to my call that they had had stillborn children in the Laurentius Ziekenhuis, in Roermond. Both of them told me they had been able to bury their child.⁷⁴⁷ ‘Mrs. J’ and ‘Mrs. K’ both agreed to an interview, and to anonymous publication of the data.

Interview with Mrs. J., July 28, 2011

Mrs. J was 36 years old when in 1975 her little girl died during delivery because the umbilical cord had been tied around her neck. She was not allowed to see her and she still does not understand why: ‘They did not tell me why I was not allowed to see her. It was my child, our child. There was no explanation nor any comfort.’⁷⁴⁸ Although her husband had seen the child in a glimpse, he did not want to talk about it with her.

She tells that, because they had an insurance policy, they were able to bury her. Her husband, who died ten years ago, went to the cemetery with the undertaker to bury her. Afterwards, he did not know exactly where they buried her, but she went to the cemetery and asked for the place. They indicated it to her and they put a tombstone with her name on it. She still visits the cemetery every week.

She does not think she has coped with her loss and gets very emotional talking about it. What bothers her the most is that she was not allowed to see the little girl: ‘I so much would have liked to touch her and tell her that she was our little girl [...] I feel guilty that I did nothing and I am mad that they did not give me a choice.’⁷⁴⁹

After she had sent me a letter telling me that she wanted to participate, she went to visit the monument at the Oude Kerkhof. She thought it was very nice, especially because it seemed as if justice was done to those children who had been denied a place in consecrated ground. Mrs. J. has her own grave, a place to visit and commemorate her daughter and does not feel the need to lay a ‘stone of thought’ in the monument at the other cemetery.

⁷⁴⁶ ‘Ik ben er eindelijk: ik heb altijd een knoop in mijn lijf gehad maar die is nu weg. Echt waar. Er zijn veel dagen dat ik er niet aan denk [...] Ik kan het nu afsluiten, net als met mijn man, niet dat je ze vergeet, maar het heeft nu een plek gekregen. Het was hetzelfde met het steentje, ik ben er erg blij mee. Ik laat het aan veel mensen zien en ze vinden het allemaal erg mooi. Sommigen vragen ernaar als ze het steentje zien liggen. Het doet me goed, ook dit gesprek.’

⁷⁴⁷ Both of them agreed to an interview: the interview with Mrs. J. took place on July 28, 2011 and with Mrs. K. on August 16, 2011.

⁷⁴⁸ ‘Ze vertelde me niet waarom dat was. Het was mijn kind, ons kind. Er was geen enkele uitleg of troost.’

⁷⁴⁹ ‘Ik had haar zo graag aangeraakt en gezegd dat ze ons meisje is [...] Ik voel me schuldig dat ik niets gedaan heb en boos ben ik dat ik geen keuze kreeg.’

Interview with Mrs. K., August 16, 2011

In 1970, when Mrs. K was pregnant of twins, unfortunately delivery started at seven months. Although she had heard them cry, they both died soon afterwards. She has not seen them. Her husband attended the burial of the two little boys, whom they named Peter and Johan. Her husband never spoke about what happened. He died a couple of years ago and she has never been able to cope with the loss: ‘I think of it every day [...] One cried a little when he was born, but they took it away. The other one, they also took it away. I was not able to hold them in my arms. They told me they were beautiful, why wasn’t I allowed to hold them? I asked but they said no.’⁷⁵⁰ She has one daughter. She knows her daughter has put a little cross of remembrance in a chapel near the Oude Kerkhof. She put the names of her brothers and her own name on the cross, but not the name of their mother. Mrs. K regrets that a lot, she does not know why her daughter did that. The relationship with her daughter has not been very good over the years. She has seen the monument at the cemetery Tussen de Bergen and thinks it is a very nice place. She would like to have her own place of commemoration of her two sons. Maybe she will have her own ‘stones of thought’ made, in remembrance of her two sons.

5.7.4 The monument in 2013

At the time of writing the text of this thesis, I again got in contact with the hospital about the present state of the monument. I was particularly interested to find out whether additional stones had been put into the monument. They told me they were not aware of any additional stones and thought that maybe people would order them through the people from the cemetery. They said they were considering giving the monument more publicity in the future.⁷⁵¹



‘Stone of thought’ commemorating Benjamin Kouters (August, 2013)
[picture Kouters family]

⁷⁵⁰ ‘Ik denk er elke dag aan [...] De ene hilde een beetje toen hij werd geboren, maar ze haalde het weg en de andere, die haalden ze ook weg. Ik kon ze niet in mijn armen houden. Ze zeiden dat het prachtige kinderen waren, waarom mocht ik ze dan niet vasthouden? Ik heb het wel gevraagd maar het mocht niet.’

⁷⁵¹ Personal communication, Patiënten Servicebureau, Laurentius Ziekenhuis, Roermond, August 6, 2013.

I contacted Mrs. Muler and asked her about her feelings on the monument. She told me that she would visit the monument with her sister at the birthday of her brother Benjamin, on August 2. At that moment she counted ten ‘stones of thought’ in the monument. They were difficult to see because a glass plate (with two big locks) had been placed above the stones. Also, the stones were covered with leaves, dirt and sand. It seemed that they needed to be cleaned, according to Mrs. Muler.⁷⁵²



Flowers commemorating Benjamin Kouters (August, 2013)
[picture Kouters family]

5.7.5 Results of the Roermond interviews

A remarkable fact with regard to this monument is that a hospital, the Laurentius hospital, very actively participated in its erection. When parents ask them about the fate of their stillborn children, they have to disappoint them because, apparently, these children have been cremated at the time and no records have been kept. The hospital emphasizes that in a way they feel responsible for what happened at the time. They want to continue this bond with the parents in the future. They realize that at the moment (2013) they do not seem to be aware what happens at the place of commemoration or how people react to the monument. For instance, they are not aware of the reason why Mrs. I did not want to put her ‘stone of thought’ into the monument. Mrs. I wanted to bring her child ‘home’, which she

⁷⁵² Personal communication, August 7, 2013

did by means of the stone and does not need a public place. The stone brings comfort; finally her grieving has stopped. Mrs. J already has her own (public) place to commemorate and indicates that she does not need a stone. Mrs. K did not know about the monument, but has seen it and thinks it is wonderful. She would like to have her own place of commemoration and the monument might offer an opportunity in this respect.⁷⁵³

Although the design and symbolism of the monument and the ‘stones of thought’ are well worked out, and were well received at the time of the dedication of the monument, only a limited number of stones have been designed and have been put into the boat.

The monument had been intended as an ‘open’ monument, which would continue to offer a place for commemoration practices after the official dedication ceremony by means of individual ‘stones of thought’ in the monument. Apparently, there has been no need for such an ‘open’ monument, or the monument is not known among parents whose child was stillborn in the Laurentius hospital. Due to the lack of information, it is difficult to clarify the reasons for this apparent, but unintended, ‘closure’ of the monument.

5.8 Een glimlach kwam voorbij, Algemene Begraafplaats, Sittard

5.8.1 Introduction

In 2010, at the meeting of the women’s council of Roermond, I met Mrs. and Mr. Ruyters, who lived in the city of Sittard, close to Roermond. Back in 1969, their stillborn child was born in the hospital of Sittard. Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard told me she took the initiative to erect a monument at the public cemetery in Sittard. This monument had been dedicated in December 2009. She had been inspired by the monuments in Roermond. She invited me to give a presentation at the yearly meeting of their foundation *Stil verdriet* (‘Silent sorrow’). At April 12, 2011, I presented my research at their yearly meeting of fellow-parents with a stillborn child. Because I had not been very successful in finding participants to the Roermond monument, I decided to include the monument in Sittard into my research project.

5.8.2 The site of the monument

The monument has been erected in the middle of one of the sections, marked by huge beeches, where, at the time, the people of the cemetery used to bury stillborn children. The monument has been placed at the junction of two small lanes which cross this field. The field is covered with low growing bushes. The place of the monument is next to, and in the vicinity of many anonymous graves of children. This place is marked, not only with the monument, but also with individual commemorative signs, indicating that parents have been able to locate the place where their child has been buried at the time.

⁷⁵³ I tried to contact Mrs. K to find out how she had acted after the interview, but I did not succeed.

There is a variety in signs: little tombstones with the name of the child, toy animals, and ceramic butterflies.



Monument Een glimlach kwam voorbij, Algemene Begraafplaats Sittard

During an interview which I held with one of the employees of the cemetery, Mr. Léon Tonglet, he explained to me the usual practice when a stillborn child was brought to the cemetery by the undertaker.⁷⁵⁴ He has been working at the cemetery as of 1976, and buried these children many times himself. This cemetery has been the general cemetery of the city of Sittard as of 1922. The cemetery has four separate sections: a catholic section, a protestant section, a Jewish section, and a neutral section. In the course of time, the cemetery has been expanded at several occasions. Mr. Tonglet tells that at the place of the monument, hundreds of children have been buried anonymously with only a little sign with a number: 'It happened almost every other day that the undertaker passed by with a stillborn child in a little coffin which we had to bury. The parents did not attend, which I thought was strange, but that was how things were those days.'⁷⁵⁵ Mr. Tonglet explains that there were special sections at the cemetery where they buried these children. The place of the monument is in one of these sections, which they used to call the *kinderpanden* (children's sections):

⁷⁵⁴ Interview with Léon Tonglet, May 17, 2011. Mr. Tonglet agreed to publication of his name.

⁷⁵⁵ 'Bijna om de dag kwam de begrafenisondernemer langs met een klein kistje. Daar zat dan een levenloos geboren kindje in en dat moesten we begraven. Daar waren geen ouders bij, niemand, alleen wij. Dat vond ik wel vreemd maar dat ging toen zo...'

‘Because of the huge beeches and their roots, it is impossible to use these sections for large graves which have to be dug out deeply. But it was possible to dig deep enough to bury a small coffin. There would be no tombstone, only a little sign with a number which we would register, together with the name of the parents and the date of burial. Later on, one of the managers removed all these plates because he thought it looked untidy.’⁷⁵⁶

Another section where they used to bury stillborn children, is located under a hedge which marks the boundary of the cemetery. Mr. Tonglet explains that this is not the unconsecrated ground: ‘We have a section which we would call “unconsecrated” at the time but it was meant just for criminals.’⁷⁵⁷ About ten years ago, out of respect to these anonymous children, employees of the cemetery took the initiative to ‘renovate’ these *kinderpanden* and they turned them into beautiful and calm places under majestic beeches.



Kinderpand under the beeches, Algemene Begraafplaats Sittard

Mr. Tonglet tells me that he has been able to assist many parents in locating the place where at the time their stillborn child has been buried: ‘A couple of years ago, Mrs. Ruyters came to me. She asked me if I could help her finding the little grave of her daughter, which I could because we have been

⁷⁵⁶ ‘Er staan hier hele grote beukenbomen en door de wortels kun je niet diep graven. Wel genoeg om een klein kistje te begraven. Er kwam geen grafsteen op, geen naam, wel een bordje met een nummer. Later heeft één van de beheerders al die nummers weggehaald. Hij vond dat sordig staan.’

⁷⁵⁷ ‘Die hebben we wel maar die werd eigenlijk alleen gebruikt voor misdadigers.’

registering everything, also the stillborn children. Ever since that time, I have been able to help out about 100 parents in finding the grave of their child.’⁷⁵⁸ Mr. Tonglet points out that some of these parents marked the place with a little cross, a stone, or a toy animal.



Commemorative signs on anonymous children's graves, Algemene Begraafplaats, Sittard

5.8.3 Symbolism

Miep Mostard-Heythuysen, sister in law of Ria Ruyters-Mostard, designed the monument.⁷⁵⁹ According to Mrs. Mostard, she designed a monument with ‘a lot of symbolism as an expression of silent grief.’⁷⁶⁰ The form of the monument, the heart of the lotus flower with the seeds and the umbilical cord, is a message of love to the deceased child.

⁷⁵⁸ ‘Een paar jaar geleden kwam mevrouw Ruyters bij mij. Ze vroeg mij of ik haar misschien kon helpen het grafje van haar dochtertje te vinden: dat kon ik dus want we hebben alles geregistreerd, ook de levenloos geboren kinderen. Sindsdien heb ik wel ongeveer 100 ouders kunnen helpen bij het vinden van het graf van hun kindje.’

⁷⁵⁹ Interview with Miep Mostard-Heythuysen, April 12, 2011. Mrs. Mostard agreed to publication of her name.

⁷⁶⁰ www.monumentdoodgeborenkindjes.nl, accessed June 20, 2011.

The monument is made of bronze and may be seen, as the artist states: ‘Like an inflorescence: the heart of the lotus flower. Broken in their growth, the seeds did not live, they died in the womb of the mother. The umbilical cord, connected to the earth, could not feed all buds and tears remained.’⁷⁶¹

Her objective with the monument is to create a monument which would be very ‘cuddly in order to contact symbolically those who are in our thoughts.’⁷⁶² At the monument, the artist put the following poem which she wrote regarding the monument:

Een glimlach kwam voorbij	A smile passed
Een korte tijd waren we gelukkig samen	We have been happy for a short while
En hebben we getracht dit leven vast te houden	And we have tried to hold on to this life
De natuur maakte een andere keuze	Nature made a different choice
En brak de knop nog voor hij openging	And the bud snapped even before it opened
Ons bleven de tranen	Tears were left for us
De glimlach ligt besloten in ons hart.	The smile is closed in our hearts.

Form, symbolism, and text relate to the love of the deceased child. The place of the monument has been deliberately chosen: in the vicinity of the graves of hundreds of stillborn children who have been buried anonymously. She called the monument *Een glimlach kwam voorbij* (‘A smile passed’), which is also engraved on the monument. Mrs. Mostard-Heythuysen tells me about her inspiration with regard to the monument:

‘I have always been very impressed by Ria’s story: you are expecting a child, and instead of returning from the hospital happily, you come home empty-handed. Where the child’s room has already been cleared and people have returned to their daily business because at the time having a stillborn child was under a taboo. Her story inspired me to create a monument which refers to the lotus flower, which symbolizes purity, truthfulness, and spirituality.’⁷⁶³

5.8.4 Initiative to the monument in Sittard

The initiative to the monument was taken by Ria Ruyters-Mostard. She had read in a local newspaper about the monuments in Roermond. In 1969, she had a stillborn child herself. The little girl, her first child, was buried without her knowing, somewhere at the cemetery in Sittard. After 1969, she had

⁷⁶¹ ‘Een bloeiwijze: het hart van de lotusbloem. Gebroken in de groei kwamen de zaden niet tot leven, ze stierven af in de moederschoot; de navelstreng, verbonden met de aarde heeft niet aan alle knoppen voedsel kunnen geven en tranen bleven over...’, www.monumentdoodgeborenkindjes.nl, accessed June 20, 2011.

⁷⁶² www.monumentdoodgeborenkindjes.nl, accessed June 20, 2011.

⁷⁶³ ‘Ik was altijd erg onder de indruk van het verhaal van Ria: je bent in verwachting en in plaats van gelukkig uit het ziekenhuis te komen sta je met lege handen thuis, waar de kinderkamer al is opgeruimd en men is overgegaan tot de orde van de dag. Er rustte destijds immers een groot taboe op het krijgen van levenloos geboren. Het verhaal van Ria inspireerde mij een monument te maken dat verwijst naar de lotusbloem, die symbool staat voor zuiverheid, waarheid en spiritualiteit.’

never spoken about her stillborn child again, until she read about the monuments in Roermond. She realized that she was not alone in her experiences: others had gone through the same and did not know what happened to their stillborn child.

Her first question was about the grave of her little daughter. With the aid of the people from the cemetery, the grave could be found and indicated to Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard and her husband. Her little girl had been buried in one of the so called *kinderpanden*, the fields where they used to bury stillborn children.

After that, she thought it would be nice to have a monument in Sittard as well. It would be a place to commemorate and remember, and also a place to meet fellow-sufferers.

Her initiative was supported by the city council of Sittard. One of the aldermen of the city council made the following statement about the monument in a press release: 'The symbol of respect to the stillborn child. But also to all those parents who were a close witness to their birth. The place of commemoration is something tangible.'⁷⁶⁴ According to Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard, the monument could be a contribution in coping with the loss.

A next step was the formation of a foundation. This foundation, with the name *Stil verdriet*, was founded in 2008. First objective of this foundation was to raise funds to have a monument designed and created. The foundation succeeded in this objective and a sister in law of Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard, the artist Miep Mostard-Heythuysen, was asked to design the monument.

At the dedication ceremony on December 18, 2009, a reverend of the Protestant Church spoke a prayer of thanks, expressing the 'immense grief, the ever remaining void, and the ever present incomprehensiveness.'⁷⁶⁵ A representative of the Roman Catholic Church would consecrate the monument but failed to appear without any due notice.⁷⁶⁶ Fellow-sufferers laid flowers and the foundation *Stil verdriet* laid flowers on behalf of all parents who were not able to attend the ceremony.

The foundation considers that they have been successful in realizing their first objective, which was to erect a monument at the place where stillborn children were buried anonymously. By means of the monument, a clear and lasting message is given about the character of this place: 'lest we pass carelessly the place where hundreds of children rest anonymously.'⁷⁶⁷

Every year, the foundation organizes a meeting during which fellow-sufferers may exchange experiences. This meeting is followed by a commemoration ceremony at the site of the monument.

⁷⁶⁴ 'Het symbool voor respect voor het levenloos geboren kind. Maar ook voor al die ouders die de geboorte hiervan van nabij hebben meegemaakt. De herdenkingsplaats is iets tastbaars,' Persbericht Stichting Gemeente Sittard-Geleen, 1 november 2008.

⁷⁶⁵ 'Onthulling monument', *De Trompetter*, 23 december 2009.

⁷⁶⁶ This appeared to be very disturbing to many parents who were, as they said, again disappointed by the Roman Catholic Church. Due to unforeseen circumstances which occurred at the last moment, the priest could not come and he had not been able to notify the board of the foundation. At a later time the monument was consecrated. The Roman Catholic Church also made a financial contribution to the foundation. In contrast with the monument in Roermond, the hospital in Sittard did not make any contribution at all, although they had been invited by Mrs. Ruyters.

⁷⁶⁷ Interview with Cor Voorter, chairman of the foundation *Stil verdriet*, July 26, 2011. Mr. Voorter agreed to publication of his name. 'Onthulling monument', *De Trompetter*, 23 december 2009.

5.8.5 Interviews with parents

In Sittard, relocating the place of burial of the stillborn child, seemed to be an essential issue to many parents. In contrast to the situation in Roermond, the children could be found with the aid of the administration of the employees of the cemetery. For this reason I interviewed a parent who had recently regained the grave of her stillborn child. I also asked Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard and her husband to participate in an interview, because I was interested in the background of the efforts they put in the construction of the monument.

*Interview with Mrs. and Mr. Ruyters, July 26, 2011*⁷⁶⁸

Background

In 1968, Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard was pregnant for the first time. She was 22 years old, her husband was 27 years old at the time. They lived in a village near Sittard, in the southern, mostly catholic part, of the Netherlands.

In January 1969, when she had already passed the time of delivery by two weeks, she noticed that she did not feel the child anymore: 'I was only 22 years old, you did not know anything, nobody told you that you should feel the child. We went to the hospital and then a doctor told me the child had died. After that, I don't remember anything.'⁷⁶⁹ Mr. Ruyters says that he was shocked and overwhelmed with grief: 'It hit me so hard, I was unable to think. I was not interested in anything. You kept breathing but I was mentally and physically incapable of carrying out any simple task.'⁷⁷⁰ He tells that his wife was in a similar condition and that must be the explanation to why she does not remember anything: 'She was almost completely in shock, she was not capable of seeing the child.'⁷⁷¹

In the hospital

Because the child did not live, she had not been baptized. They named her Elisabeth, after the mother of Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard. Mr. Ruyters: 'I am a catholic, it was without any respect. I find it difficult to cope with the fact that she has not been baptized. Nobody did anything: the doctors, the church, they did not pay attention, very disrespectful.'⁷⁷²

Mr. Ruyters starts to cry when he tells about the burial of the child: 'They allowed me to see her before she was buried. It was a beautiful child [...] I had to hand over the coffin at the cemetery but I was not allowed to attend the burial.'⁷⁷³ He has known all the time where she was buried: 'I know

⁷⁶⁸ Mrs. Ruyters has told her story many times in public, for that reason the results of the interview are not presented anonymously.

⁷⁶⁹ 'Ik was pas tweeëntwintig jaar oud, je wist niks, niemand had me verteld dat je het kindje zou moeten voelen. We gingen naar het ziekenhuis en een dokter verteld me dat het kindje dood was. Daarna weet ik niks meer.'

⁷⁷⁰ 'De klap was zo groot, je kunt niet meer nadenken, niks interesseerde je meer, je ademde, maar je was van de wereld af.'

⁷⁷¹ 'Ze was helemaal van de kaart. Ze was lichamelijk voor negenennegentig procent van de wereld, ze was niet in staat het kind te zien.'

⁷⁷² 'Ik ben katholiek. Het was zo respectloos. Ik kan het moeilijk verwerken dat ze niet is gedoopt. Niemand deed iets: de dokters, de kerk. Ze besteedden er geen aandacht aan, zo respectloos.'

⁷⁷³ 'Ik mocht haar nog zien voordat ze werd begraven. Het was een mooi kindje [...] Ik moest het kistje bij de begraafplaats afgeven maar ik mocht niet bij de begrafenis zijn.'

exactly where it was buried, next to the hedge.⁷⁷⁴ Mr. Ruyters never told his wife that he had seen the child; neither did he tell her about the burial.

The time after: silence

When she got home from the hospital, Mrs. Ruyters' sister in law, Miep, had cleared away all child things and they never discussed the child again. Mrs. Ruyters: 'We never spoke about it anymore until we started with the monument. I did not push it away on purpose [...] I was a little selfish at the time because I did not have a child. I wanted as quickly as possible to become pregnant again, which I did. We have three children now.'⁷⁷⁵

Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard does not regret that she did not see the child:

'I did not see the child. It was a very difficult delivery. I do not need a picture of the child, if there would have been one. I think that I would start to mourn if I would see a picture of it [...] Sometimes I feel guilty when I say that. I was very much physically upset at the time, I did not ask. I just wanted to go home, to my mother! I had been spoilt when I was young, I think I perceived the child was a doll [...] Later, when I saw the little grave I thought: I am being punished, because I did not pay any attention at the time.'⁷⁷⁶

Mr. Ruyters tells that:

'It was a huge shock when it happened [...] I have not been the same afterwards [...] We thought: "it is gone", that is why we did not ask. It was very unreal because it was a taboo, nobody spoke about it [...] But I can tell you: there has not been a day that I did not think about it when I see a hedge.'⁷⁷⁷

The initiative to the monument

When Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard learned from the newspaper that the monuments in Roermond had been unveiled, she thought that it would be nice to have a monument in Sittard as well. Her husband agreed

⁷⁷⁴ 'Ik weet precies waar het begraven is, vlakbij de heg.'

⁷⁷⁵ 'We hebben het er nooit meer over gehad, tot we met het monument begonnen zijn. Ik heb het niet moedwillig weggedrukt [...] Ik was een beetje egoïstisch in die tijd omdat ik geen kind had. Ik wilde zo snel mogelijk weer zwanger worden. Dat gebeurde ook en we hebben nu drie kinderen.'

⁷⁷⁶ 'Ik heb het niet gezien, het was een heel moeilijke bevalling. Ik hoef geen foto van het kind, als er al één zou zijn geweest. Ik denk dat ik zou beginnen te rouwen als ik een foto zou zien [...] Ik voel me soms wel schuldig als ik dat zeg. Ik was fysiek totaal van de kaart, ik heb er niet om gevraagd. Ik wilde alleen maar naar huis, naar mijn moeder toe! Ik was een beetje verwend toen ik jong was, ik denk dat ik het kind als een pop beschouwde [...] Toen ik later het grafje zag dacht ik: Ik word gestraft omdat ik er toen te weinig aandacht aan heb besteed.'

⁷⁷⁷ 'Mijn leven kreeg een knap toen het gebeurde [...] Ik was niet meer dezelfde persoon daarna [...] We dachten: "Het is weg," daarom hebben we er niet meer naar gevraagd. Het was allemaal erg onwerkelijk omdat het onderwerp compleet taboe was, niemand die er over sprak [...] Maar ik kan u vertellen: "Er is geen dag dat ik er niet aan denk als ik een heg zie."'

and she started to act: ‘Everybody thought it was a good idea. And then we started to talk with each other which we had not done before. Everything came out.’⁷⁷⁸ Mr. Ruyters says: ‘It was not like you at all, maybe you acted out of guilt. You immediately started to call everybody and to talk.’⁷⁷⁹

The meaning of the monument

According to Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard the monument means: ‘The place where the child lays, I will go there on All Saints. But I am not very emotional [...] It belongs to us now. It is something we experience together now.’⁷⁸⁰ Mr. Ruyters says that he feels they differ in this respect:

‘We have a difference in experience. Maybe because I did see it [...] I think it is a very, very nice monument! It will last forever [...] It is a monument of love, not of resentment [...] Who would ever have thought 25 years ago that we would have a monument! It brings me a lot of comfort that there is so much attention to this matter nowadays. The monument means a tremendous reversal in my life. A difference between day and night! It means recognition of what happened and that finally justice is done.’⁷⁸¹

Interview with Mrs. L and her son, July 12, 2011

After the interview on the monument in Roermond had been published in the newspaper, I received a letter from Mrs. L.⁷⁸² She told me she was 35 years old when she had given birth in 1983 to two twin boys in the hospital of Sittard. A couple of months before she was due, the doctors told her that one of the boys had a severe handicap and probably would not survive. He died two days after birth. The other boy was born healthy. Her husband made the arrangements for the burial of the child. He has never told her what happened and where the child had been buried. He died a couple of years ago, so they could not ask him what had happened at the time.

Her son and his girlfriend were expecting their first child at the time Mrs. L wrote me the letter, and they had asked her what happened to the twin brother. When she read the interview, she thought that maybe I could help them in finding out. I wrote to her that she should contact Mr. Tonglet of the cemetery in Sittard, and that he might be able to trace the grave.

⁷⁷⁸ ‘Iedereen vond dat het een goed idee was. En toen zijn we gaan praten wat we nog nooit hadden gedaan. Alles kwam los.’

⁷⁷⁹ ‘Je bent helemaal niet zo. Ik denk dat jij dat monumentje toch uit een soort van schuldgevoel bent begonnen. Maar je begon meteen met iedereen te bellen en te praten.’

⁷⁸⁰ ‘Het is de plaats waar het kindje ligt en waar ik naar toe zal gaan op Allerheiligen. Het hoort erbij maar ik ben niet heel emotioneel. We beleven het nu wel samen.’

⁷⁸¹ ‘We hebben een verschil in beleving, misschien omdat ik het wel heb gezien [...] Ik denk dat het een heel, heel mooi monument is. Het zal er voor eeuwig zijn [...] Het is een monument van liefde, niet van wrok [...] Wie had ooit kunnen denken 25 jaar geleden dat er een monument zou komen! Het doet me heel veel goed dat er nu zoveel aandacht voor het onderwerp is. Het monument betekent een geweldige ommekeer in mijn leven. Een verschil van dag en nacht! Het betekent erkenning van wat er is gebeurd en eindelijk is er gerechtigheid gekomen.’

⁷⁸² BUITENHUIS: ‘Monument van verdriet’.

After she sent me an email with the message that they followed my advice, and that Mr. Tonglet had been able to indicate the grave, I asked her if they would agree to participate in an interview, which they did.

In the hospital

Mrs. L tells that they advised her not to have a look at the child once he had been born:

‘He advised me not to have a look, because then I would have that picture in my mind forever. I thought: it is my child, I will decide on that and nobody else. But during birth I decided not to see it and neither afterwards. I don’t regret that decision. Maybe it was easier for me, because I had another healthy child [...] We are catholic, they told me they had given him a lay baptism. When they wheeled me in my bed to the ward where my children were, they told me to look at the ceiling when we passed his crib, which I did.’⁷⁸³

The child died two days after birth. Her husband arranged everything with the undertaker. When he came back from the hospital, he gave her a card with their name on it: ‘He told me everything had been taken care of and that we should not speak about it again, which we never did.’⁷⁸⁴ She saw him emotional only once, when he spoke to a colleague who was expecting twins and said he hoped they would be luckier than they had been.

Now, she finds it difficult to realize how things went: ‘I was physically not able to do anything but I think I did not want it either at the time. They told me it would die. It just was not there for me and if it would not there, you would not feel sad, I thought. But that is not how it goes.’⁷⁸⁵

Retracing his grave

Mrs. L tells that it has never been a secret to her other son that he had had a twin brother. Only recently they have been discussing it more often. Together with his girlfriend and her other daughter, they have visited the grave at the cemetery in Sittard: ‘It was emotional, although I don’t feel sad. The whole story came up again. But it does not hurt anymore. It is more like a scar which hurts a little bit. I have seen the monument as well. Very nice, but I do not feel the need to speak to fellow victims.’⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸³ ‘Hij adviseerde me het kind niet te zien omdat ik dan dat beeld voor altijd in mijn gedachten zou hebben. Ik dacht: “Het is mijn kind en ik zal dat zelf beslissen en niemand anders.” Maar tijdens de geboorte heb ik toch besloten dat ik het niet wilde zien en ook erna niet. Misschien was dat makkelijker voor mij omdat ik nog een gezond kind had [...] Wij zijn katholiek en ze hebben mij verteld dat hij een nooddoop heeft gehad. Toen ze mij met mijn bed de afdeling opreden waar mijn kinderen lagen, zeiden ze tegen me dat ik naar het plafond moest kijken toen we zijn bedje passeerden, dat heb ik toen gedaan.’

⁷⁸⁴ ‘Hij zei me dat alles was geregeld en dat we er niet meer over moesten praten. En dat hebben we ook nooit meer gedaan.’

⁷⁸⁵ ‘Ik was lichamelijk niet in staat iets te doen maar misschien wilde ik het ook niet, ik denk het niet. Er was toen gezegd dat het zou overlijden en het was er gewoon voor mij niet en als het er niet was dan had je er ook geen verdriet van. Maar zo werkte het dus niet.’

⁷⁸⁶ ‘Het was wel emotioneel hoewel ik niet verdrietig was. Het hele verhaal komt wel weer naar boven. Het is meer als een litteken dat nog pijn doet. Ik heb het monument gezien. Heel mooi maar ik heb geen behoefte aan lotgenoten contact.’

Her son says that he thinks it is important that there is a place to visit. He says he would like to put a little cross or a sculpture on the grave.⁷⁸⁷

5.8.6 Results of the Sittard interviews

Mr. Ruyters still very much regrets the disrespectful way doctors and the Roman Catholic Church acted at the time of the stillbirth of his first child. He finds it difficult to accept that his daughter has not been baptized. The stillbirth had a tremendous impact on his life. His wife and he himself never spoke with each other about what happened, until his wife took the initiative to erect a monument. For both, the monument meant the start of a process in which they tried to come to terms with the loss. Issues like ‘guilt’ (‘should she not have started mourning before’) and ‘justice’ (‘finally justice is done to their firstborn child’) are at stake.

The meaning of the Sittard monument is probably best expressed by Mrs. Ruyters-Mostard, who says that the monument has a meaning not only to herself, but to all parents with stillborn children: ‘A place to remember, alone or together, those children who did not get a name, but who became part of our lives. Parents may settle their “silent grief” in this way.’⁷⁸⁸

In this respect, the monument may be seen as a place for public commemoration practices. The monument in Sittard is ‘special’, because it has been placed in the vicinity of the graves where, at the time, stillborn children were buried anonymously. Many families, for instance Mrs. L and her son, have been able to retrace the grave of their stillborn child, which was an emotional but not a sad experience. Mrs. L already appeared to have come to terms with the loss of her stillborn child, however, regaining his grave meant a lot, also to her other children. At last they have a place to visit for commemoration practices. In this respect, they consider the monument less important to their own particular commemoration needs.

5.9 Conclusion

The focus of this case study was on parents who, for a long time, have been ‘forced’ for different reasons to keep commemoration of their stillborn child within a private context. With the emergence as of 2001 of monuments to stillborn children, they have the opportunity to utilize a monument at a particular place as a ‘specific commemorative vehicle’, thus enabling them to share their individual memories with a wider audience.⁷⁸⁹ On a widespread basis, parents have made use of these monuments. However, at the time of this thesis (2013), a tentative conclusion, made on basis of the update on the Roermond and Nijmegen monuments, runs as follows: it seems as if the objective of these

⁷⁸⁷ I tried to contact them in 2013, to find out what had happened after the interview, but did not get any response on my email messages.

⁷⁸⁸ ‘Een herinneringsplek om alleen of samen stil te staan bij die kinderen die geen naam hebben gekregen, maar die wel deel zijn gaan uitmaken van ons leven. Ouders kunnen hun stil verdriet een plekje geven’, www.monumentdoodgeborenkindjes.nl, accessed June 15, 2011.

⁷⁸⁹ CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time.’

monuments has been achieved, as no additional individual ritual commemorative elements have been added in the recent period.

The results of the exploration of the individual context of these parents show that most of them still very much regret that they were prohibited by medical and religious practice at the time to create an emotional bond with their stillborn child. They blame themselves for not having strongly objected to this denial of the parent-child relationship.

Most of them still worry about what has happened to their stillborn child who, most of the time, was cremated or buried at an unknown place anonymously. They had been denied any commemorative (religious) ritual ceremony.

They all feel that their stillborn child has been silenced and disregarded, because at the time it was thought best never to speak about the child again, and instead focus on other children who could be born in good health in the years after. The social context was thus one of ignoring, in particular emotional, issues with regard to stillborn children.

Regrets, worries, silence, and disregard of their stillborn child, all contribute to a release of emotions, even many years after the stillbirth of their child. In particular when any other children start to raise families, the memories of their own worries during pregnancy and birth seem to return. Moreover, emotions are unlocked when they experience the difference regarding the current approach to stillborn children: why were they not allowed to bond with their stillborn child and give it a proper farewell ritual?

The results of the interviews show that most of the parents had not come to terms with the loss of their child, because of the already discussed regrets, worries, silence, and disregard of their stillborn child before they enacted a commemoration ritual at a monument.

Regarding the function and meaning of monuments to stillborn children, the following may be concluded from my exploration.

Casey holds the opinion that memory is naturally 'place-oriented', or at least 'place-supported'. Memory itself is a place where in the past can revive and survive.⁷⁹⁰

The research on the background and meaning of the three case study monuments confirm Casey's statements, as they show that parents of stillborn children need a 'place' in order to, finally, come to terms with the loss of their stillborn child. A monument, or a retraced grave, may 'work' in this respect.

Sometimes, the monument, place, and commemorative ritual practices, also mean a coming to terms with the disrespectful way in which a stillbirth was handled by others at the time, like for instance care givers in the hospital and priests from the Roman Catholic Church.

In line with Casey, this might explain why in this case study, most participants' main worry was about the whereabouts of their children as they were searching for a place 'where the past could revive and

⁷⁹⁰ CASEY: *Remembering. A Phenomenological Study* 187.

survive', in terms of Casey.⁷⁹¹ Some were able to locate this place, others were not. A monument may offer such a place instead, when no tombstone is available, a place for ritual commemoration practices, which may accordingly help out in the process of handling the loss, even many years after the stillbirth of the child.

⁷⁹¹ CASEY: *Remembering. A Phenomenological Study* 187.

Chapter 6

Monument to the Harmelen railway disaster

*People find a monument beautiful or ugly, but it goes beyond beauty. The ritual significance of a place is very important. Monuments can represent desire, be projections of our human impotence, of the vulnerability of the human spirit, of universal drama. This goes beyond aesthetics.*⁷⁹²

6.1 Introduction

On January 8, 1962, a foggy Monday morning, an express train from the direction of Utrecht collided, almost frontal, with a slow train from the direction of Rotterdam. Ninety-one passengers were immediately killed and 52 were injured. In the days after, two more passengers died because of their injuries. Both train operators were among the fatalities. To the present day, this collision remains the biggest railway disaster in Dutch history.

In the vicinity of the village of Harmelen, about 30 kilometers west of the city of Utrecht, these trains would normally cross tracks without any difficulty. The express train would arrive first at that point and a couple of minutes later the other train would pass.

But that particular Monday morning, the express train, one locomotive and 11 carriages with around 900 passengers aboard, was late. For that reason, the train traffic controller decided that the train from Rotterdam, with two carriages and about 180 passengers aboard, would cross first and continue its journey in the direction of Amsterdam. He put the first train signal for the express train on orange, and the second signal on red. But unfortunately, and maybe because of the heavy fog, the train operator of the express train failed to notice the orange signal. He did not reduce speed, which he should have done in order to stop the train in front of the red signal.⁷⁹³

Both trains collided almost head-on. The express train with a speed of about 120 kilometers an hour, the slow train with a speed of approximately 60 kilometers an hour.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹² Statement by Rudi van der Wint (1942-2006), Dutch artist and designer of the International Tenerife Memorial (2007), FOUNDATION FOR THE SURVIVING RELATIVES OF THE TENERIFE DISASTER: 'International Tenerife Memorial' 16.

⁷⁹³ JANSON: *De treinramp bij Harmelen*.

⁷⁹⁴ JANSON: *De treinramp bij Harmelen*; Documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.



The Harmelen railway disaster

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The consequences were terrible. Because of the speed, the trains were twined causing an awful damage and, as said, many victims.

Until 2004, no monument had been erected to remember and honour the victims of this railroad crash. In 2004, a monument in commemoration of all railroad victims throughout the years was raised in the city of Utrecht. The Nederlandse Spoorwegen (hereafter: Dutch Railways) had taken the initiative to raise a general monument commemorating all victims, also including future victims, related to the railways.

However, exactly 50 years after the Harmelen crash, on January 8, 2012, a monument honouring these victims in particular, was raised near the site of the accident.

6.2 This case study

6.2.1 Focus and context of this case study

In this case study the focus will be on commemorative practices of people involved with the Harmelen disaster, and the function and meaning of both, the monument in Utrecht, and the monument near the site of the crash. Why was there still a demand for a specific monument: did this general monument not meet the needs of people closely involved with the Harmelen crash?

The Harmelen railway crash was a collision with a huge impact with regard to victims, material, and immaterial damages, and its consequences were felt for a long time by many people. This serious accident may be called a 'disaster' in this respect.

The context of this case study will be the context of collective commemoration ritual practices after disasters, in particular regarding the erection of monuments. Post, Nugteren, Grimes, Petterson, and Grimes conclude in their seminal work on disaster ritual in the years 1990-2001, that a monument is an essential element in current disaster ritual and may be considered as one of its 'pillars'.⁷⁹⁵ This exploration tries to find an answer to the reasons of 'postponement' of the Harmelen monument. It could be that commemoration practices at the time of the Harmelen crash in 1962 did not 'include' a monument at the site of the crash.

Another issue that needs consideration is the effect of the current disaster ritual on disasters in the past. This case study focuses on the Harmelen railway crash, but other disasters need to be explored in order to (tentatively) conclude whether the postponed Harmelen monument is a unique phenomenon or a demonstration of a possible new emerging ritual practice regarding disasters in the past.

6.2.2 Set-up of this case study

The focus in this case study will be on people closely involved with the Harmelen disaster and consequently the focus will be on personal stories and experiences. Around the 50th anniversary, and perhaps caused by a lot of attention from the media, personal stories of people about their experiences at the time, were published. These stories were included into the source materials used in this case study.

Various source materials will be used, including sound and film recordings, written testimonies of eye-witnesses, reports, text materials, reconstructions in documentaries, conversations with participants, and interviews with people closely related to the monument.⁷⁹⁶

I conducted interviews with the following people:

- Hans Fictoor, February 1, 2012: son of one of the train operators;
- Bob Kradolfer, February 22, 2012: passenger of one of the trains;
- Ed Janson, February 23, 2012: Dorpsplatform Harmelen, initiator of the Harmelen monument;
- Ton Honing, February 29, 2012: Nederlandse Spoorwegen, Corporate Communication.

This case study will start with a description of the salvage of the victims and the immediate aftermath of the Harmelen disaster.

Subsequently, the background, function, and meaning of the general monument, the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen, and of the Harmelen monument will be explored.

⁷⁹⁵ POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual* 246.

⁷⁹⁶ Post *et al.* used this research method in their work on disaster ritual: POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster Ritual* 17-18.

After these explorations of the current monuments relating to railway disasters, I will pay attention to the aspect of ‘postponement’. A first issue that needs consideration is the general disaster ritual repertoire at the time of the Harmelen disaster in 1962. Was erection of a monument a usual element in the ritual repertoire after a disaster at the time?

A second issue that has to be considered, is the current disaster ritual repertoire and the element ‘monument’. The present disaster ritual could have an effect on memorial culture around disasters in the past.

I will commence with a description of the aftermath of the Harmelen disaster from the perspective of people closely involved, like relatives of deceased victims, injured victims, rescuers, and other eye-witnesses.

6.3 The Harmelen railway disaster: the aftermath

6.3.1 Salvage of the victims

The salvage of the victims was started immediately by people from the local community. Fifty years later, in 2012, Gijs Kroon, a farmer who lives next to the railway tracks and close by the place of collision, testifies emotionally about that day back in 1962:

‘There was screaming all over, a sinister picture. But there was little you could do, because at that time we did not have the equipment to free the victims like we have nowadays. I felt helpless.’⁷⁹⁷

Soon after the crash, medical staff from local and regional hospitals arrived and salvage was started. At the time there were no official salvage protocols like there are nowadays. Many people voluntarily rushed to the site of the accident to offer assistance and had to improvise because they lacked the right equipment. Most of those involved in the rescue operation were local people. These people still remember clearly, even 50 years after the accident, the horrible pictures of victims, either dead or severely wounded and often mutilated. They remember loose limbs everywhere, and passengers still trapped in the wrecks of the trains, screaming out loudly.

One of them, the son of the mayor of one of the nearby villages, Pieter Breen, assisted in the salvaging and testifies that he will never get rid of the terrible things he witnessed that day. He says that also the people who assisted, and the passengers who survived, must be counted among the traumatized.⁷⁹⁸ Henny Koetsier, a local voluntary firefighter, who was among the first group of rescuers arriving at the

⁷⁹⁷ ‘Overall was geschreeuw, een luguber beeld, maar je kon zo weinig doen want we hadden toen geen materiaal om de mensen te bevrijden, zoals we dat nu hebben. Ik voelde me machteloos,’ testimony Gijs Kroon: Documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁷⁹⁸ JANSON: *De treinramp bij Harmelen* 44-45.

site of the crash, says: 'All those people severely wounded, profusely bleeding, it is something that will stick to my mind forever.'⁷⁹⁹

Kees van der Meer, an army soldier who happened to be in the slow train that morning, assisted for hours in succession rescuing and liberating victims. Even after all those years, he has trouble telling about that day because of his emotions. That day he saw many victims, dead and alive, many times severely mutilated. The first minutes after the crash, it was completely silent, and then the screaming started of all those passengers who were trapped. The images and sounds of people in agony of death, the scenes of mutilated bodies and ripped of limbs still haunt him daily. But in those years, people did not discuss each other's emotions, you had to go on and act as if nothing had happened. He thinks that this is the reason why so many people are still having problems because of what they experienced.⁸⁰⁰

That day, Jan Veenstra and his fiancée were on their way to Rotterdam. They boarded the express train in the city of Hilversum. He remembers that there were about 40 passengers in their carriage. After the collision he found himself on top of a 'pile' of victims. He managed to find his fiancée, who had lost an ear and was hurt in her face, and together they got out. He states that is a miracle they got out alive.⁸⁰¹

Another passenger, Coos Haak, was on his way to the city of Delft:

'All of a sudden I felt that the train was braking very strongly. I thought: O my god, and I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, people were lying upon me and I was lying upon other people. I saw loose limbs, a loose head, and a woman with an opened chest. I did not realize that all those people had died. I only thought: I have to get out of here. I crawled out. There was a deathly silence out there, on the tracks. That was the worst of the whole accident: that silence. Very ominous. It held on for about two, three minutes, and then the screaming and yelling started; also the men were bellowing like bulls.'⁸⁰²

Coos Haak managed to get out and was taken to the hospital where he was operated on.

⁷⁹⁹ 'Al die gewonden, die zwaar bloedden, dat is mij het meest bijgebleven,' testimony Henny Koetsier: Documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸⁰⁰ *Het was over tot de orde van de dag* in: *Trouw* January 7, 2012, www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/archief/article/detail/3109601/2012/01/07/Het-was-over-tot-de-orde-van-de-dag.dhtml, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸⁰¹ Testimony Jan Veenstra: Documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸⁰² 'Opeens voelde ik dat de trein heel hard remde. O god, dacht ik, en van schrik deed ik mijn ogen dicht. Toen ik ze weer open deed, lagen er mensen op mij en lag ik op mensen. Ik zag losse ledematen, een los hoofd, een vrouw met de borst helemaal open. Ik realiseerde me niet dat al die mensen dood waren. Ik dacht alleen: ik moet hieruit. Op handen en voeten kroop ik naar buiten. Op de spoordijk was het doodstil. Dat vond ik het ergste van het hele ongeluk: die stilte. Zo onheilspellend. Het duurde twee, drie minuten, en daarna kwam het gekrijs en gegil los; ook de mannen loeiden als stieren.' Testimony of Coos Haak, POSTMA: 'Mijn verhaal: De treinramp bij Harmelen'.

Passengers who were not harmed felt helpless, because there was so little they could do. One of them, Wouter Ruberg, tells in a documentary which was made on the occasion of the 50 years commemoration, for the first time, how he was not able to help a woman who was trapped in the wreckage:

‘She looked at me and addressed me, asked me to get help. I told her I was going to get help, which I did not do because it was impossible: there were two train carriages piled on top of her. I have always felt that I sort of let her down. Maybe she had wanted to tell me something, pass on a message. This image has been haunting me since that time. I did not consider myself able at that moment in time, to tell her what her situation was really like.’⁸⁰³

In the documentary, he tells about this experience for the first time in 50 years, which is a very emotional affair to him.

Another passenger who got out safe, Bob Kradolfer, says:

‘I still remember the cry of a woman, still trapped down in the wreckage: “Help me, I can’t get out.” But there was nothing I could do. You would need a crane to take the steel apart. I am certain that I could not have helped her. I walked away, but after all those years I still get emotional when I think that I sort of abandoned her. I have never known what has become of her, but this image in my mind is even worse than all the dead bodies that I have seen.’⁸⁰⁴

Another passenger had been assisting in the salvaging before finally passing out. In the afternoon, he had recovered a little bit and wanted to go home. He lived in a village called Urk, about 100 kilometers from Harmelen. There was no other possibility but to take the train again... He did so, but it was a horrible trip. After the disaster, for two years he had to travel each Monday morning by train to the city of Dordrecht to go to work, and thus he had to pass by Harmelen and the site of the crash. Every Monday morning, the ‘movie’ with all the pictures, sounds, and experiences started to turn again. Two years after the Harmelen disaster, he decided to change jobs in order to avoid Harmelen.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰³ Testimony Wouter Ruberg: ‘Ze keek naar me en adresseerde haar blik op mij, vroeg me hulp te halen. Ik vertelde haar dat ik hulp zou halen maar dat heb ik niet gedaan omdat dat onmogelijk was, er lagen twee treinstellen bovenop haar. Ik heb altijd het gevoel gehad dat ik haar in de steek heb gelaten. Misschien had ze me iets willen vertellen, of een boodschap door willen geven. Dit beeld krijg ik heel vaak terug. Ik vind mezelf niet flink omdat ik haar niet verteld heb hoe haar situatie werkelijk was’: Documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸⁰⁴ ‘Ik herinner me de schreeuw van een vrouw die nog vast zat in het wrak: “Help mij, ik kan er niet uit.” Maar ik kon niets doen. Je zou een kraan nodig hebben om het ijzer uit elkaar te trekken. Ik weet zeker dat ik haar niet had kunnen helpen. Ik ben weggelopen, maar na al die jaren word ik nog steeds emotioneel als ik me bedenk dat ik haar als het ware in de steek heb gelaten. Ik heb nooit geweten wat er met haar gebeurd is, maar dit beeld in mijn herinnering is veel erger dan alle lijken die ik heb gezien.’ Bob Kradolfer, trainpassenger, personal communication, February 2012.

⁸⁰⁵ Testimony H. Taal, www.plusonline.nl/mensenenmeningen/artikelen/artikel/3082/ik-herinner-mij-de-treinramp-bij-harmelen, accessed September 18, 2013.



The Harmelen railway disaster: salvage of the victims

[copyrights picture: E.M.Ch.M. Janson 2011, Regionaal Historisch Centrum Rijnstreek en Lopikerwaard]

All fatal victims had been put in a row near the railway tracks and were taken to a church afterwards. It took hours to inform relatives of the deceased about the fate of their family members.

Mrs. Plomp, whose husband and one of her sons were aboard the slow train, says that she was informed by a neighbour about the accident and that she had realized immediately that her husband and son were among the passengers. She was informed about their death at around eight o'clock in the evening.⁸⁰⁶

Hans Fictoor says that his father, the operator of the slow train, was one of the last victims salvaged from the wreckage:

⁸⁰⁶ Testimony Corry Plomp in a documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/aflleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

‘Whenever I look at one of those pictures of the wreckage, the only thing I can think of is, that my father must be somewhere in that scrapheap. He received the first blow. The train had a flat front so he was sitting with his face right at the window. You can imagine what he looked like when they finally got him out.’⁸⁰⁷



The Harmelen railway disaster

[copyrights picture: E.M.Ch.M. Janson 2011, Regionaal Historisch Centrum Rijnstreek en Lopikerwaard]

6.3.2 The aftermath: ritual commemorative practices and ‘life goes on’

The coffins with the victims were all jointly put together in a church in Utrecht, the Buurkerk. The royal family returned from their winter holiday. Queen Juliana, her husband, and other officials, paid a visit to the place of the disaster. She paid tribute to the deceased who were lying in state in the Buurkerk and visited injured people in hospital.⁸⁰⁸ Dutch Railways called Friday January 12 a day of mourning. A short ceremony with wreath laying was held in front of the main building of Dutch Railways, near the monument in honour of railway personnel who died during the Second World War.⁸⁰⁹ From all government buildings, railway buildings, and stations, flags were flying half-mast. This day

⁸⁰⁷ ‘Altijd als ik naar een van die foto’s kijk van de wrakstukken, dan is het enige dat ik kan bedenken dat mijn vader daar ergens in die schroothoop moet liggen. Hij ving de eerste klap op. De trein had een platte voorkant en hij zat met zijn neus op het raam, je kunt je wel voorstellen hoe hij er uitzag toen ze hem er uiteindelijk uithaalden.’ Hans Fictoor, son of one of the train operators, personal communication, February 1, 2012.

⁸⁰⁸ JANSON: *De treinramp bij Harmelen* 32.

⁸⁰⁹ FICTOOR: *Ter nagedachtenis Treinramp Harmelen 8 januari 1962* 90.

was chosen, because most of the victims were buried that day. In Harmelen, the day after, Saturday 13, was chosen as a day of mourning. In both protestant and catholic churches, ceremonies were held in remembrance of the victims.⁸¹⁰

Hans Fictoor, son of the slow train operator, clearly remembers the funeral of his father:

‘At that time we lived in Rotterdam. We were catholic. A service was held in remembrance of the victims and more in particular of my father, on Tuesday in our local parish church. The church was crowded with people. His funeral took place on Friday. Everywhere in the street and in the next street, neighbours hang white sheets from the windows to honour my father. I knew this custom, when my grandmother died, our neighbours also hung a white sheet from the window. But now: almost two streets all white sheets, very impressive. The coffin was carried into the church by railway personnel, dressed in their uniforms. They formed two rows through which the coffin passed into the church. He was given great honours by his colleagues.’⁸¹¹

But the week following the disaster and the funerals, people went back to business and on with their lives. Or even earlier as Bob Kradolfer says: ‘I was a policeman at that time. My shift started in the afternoon of the accident and I went to work, just as normal. People were happy that I got out safely, but that was it. You just got on with your life.’⁸¹²

Hans Fictoor tells what he experienced that time:

‘I went back to work and my colleagues had been instructed not to talk to me about the accident and the death of my father. The same had been done at my sisters’ schools. And I wanted so much to share my emotions but most people kept a distance.’⁸¹³

Wouter Ruberg explains:

⁸¹⁰ JANSON: *De treinramp bij Harmelen*.

⁸¹¹ ‘We woonden toen in Rotterdam. We waren katholiek. Er werd een dienst gehouden ter nagedachtenis van de slachtoffers en in het bijzonder voor mijn vader, op dinsdag in onze eigen parochiekerk. De kerk was stampvol met mensen. De begrafenis was op vrijdag. Overal in de straat, en in de volgende, hadden burens witte lakens uit de ramen gehangen ter ere van mijn vader. Ik leerde dit gebruik van toen mijn grootmoeder overleed, onze burens hingen toen ook een wit laken uit het raam. Maar nu: bijna twee straten, overal witte lakens, heel indrukwekkend. De kist werd door spoorwegpersoneel de kerk ingedragen. Ze waren in uniform en vormden twee rijen waar de kist doorheen ging de kerk in. Hij kreeg veel respect van zijn collega’s.’ Hans Fictoor, personal communication, February 2012.

⁸¹² ‘Ik was toen een politieagent. Mijn dienst begon in de middag van het ongeluk. Ik ging naar het werk, net als altijd. Mensen waren blij dat ik er veilig uitgekomen was, maar dat was het. Je ging door met je leven.’ Bob Kradolfer, personal communication, February 1, 2012.

⁸¹³ ‘Ik ging weer aan het werk en mijn collega’s waren geïnstrueerd met mij niet over het ongeluk te praten en ook niet over de dood van mijn vader. Hetzelfde gebeurde op de school van mijn zussen. En ik had zo graag mijn emoties gedeeld maar de meeste mensen bleven op afstand.’ Hans Fictoor, personal communication, February 1, 2012.

‘It was a different time. People did not discuss emotions, you can’t compare it with nowadays [...] There was no psychological help or assistance for victims, passengers, or rescue people, like there is nowadays. Some people never wanted to talk again about what they had experienced.’⁸¹⁴

On the absence of assistance, Gijs Kroon says: ‘There was nobody who offered to help you, like there is nowadays. I would have liked to have that. Nobody wanted to talk, like for instance my neighbours, they always say: don’t talk about that.’⁸¹⁵

Janson concludes that the following morning after the accident, trains were driving slow speed along the site of the disaster. Within 48 hours, the train schedule was back to normal.⁸¹⁶

‘Life goes on’, as became obvious in Harmelen: 48 hours after the tragedy in which 93 passengers lost their lives, trains passed the site of the accident at full speed as if nothing had happened. The remnants of the tragedy were visible from the train when passing by. As one of the eyewitnesses says: ‘The trains started to ride again and all should be done with.’⁸¹⁷

Coos Haak tells, that during his stay in the hospital, nobody spoke with him about the accident, nor did they offer him psychological help. According to Haak, the ‘system’ was as follows: put things into perspective, laugh about it, and continue to go on. Only when he got home he realized what had happened. Because he had lost his ear in the accident, he got a lot of attention from the media. He tells, that a few weeks after the crash, he was visited by a couple of doctors because of the claims settlement. Papers had to be filled out and he was asked by these official people whether he had still looked for his ear after the crash. Haak mentions this as an illustration of how things were back in the 1960s: very formal, not very tactfully. They got 4,500 guilders damages and bought a car and a radio, which still works. And that was it, he and his wife had to cope together and get over it.⁸¹⁸

After the accident, a big inquiry was started in order to find out what exactly had happened and caused the collision. At regular times, reports about the findings were published in the media. Besides the

⁸¹⁴ Testimony Wouter Ruberg: ‘Het was een andere tijd. Mensen spraken niet over emoties. Je kunt het niet vergelijken met nu [...] Er was geen psychologische hulp of bijstand voor slachtoffers, passagiers of mensen die hielpen bij de reddingsoperatie zoals daar nu is, sommigen mensen wilden er nooit meer over praten,’ in a documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸¹⁵ Testimony Gijs Kroon: ‘Er was niemand die hulp aanbood, zoals dat nu gebeurt. Ik had dat wel gewild. Niemand wilde er over praten zoals bijvoorbeeld mijn burens. Die zeggen altijd: “daar willen we niet over praten”,’ in a documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸¹⁶ JANSON: *De treinramp bij Harmelen* 32.

⁸¹⁷ Testimony Mrs. Beijeman: ‘De treinen gingen weer rijden en dan moet het maar over zijn,’ in a documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸¹⁸ Testimony of Coos Haak, POSTMA: ‘Mijn verhaal: De treinramp bij Harmelen’.

tragedy and the fate of the victims, safety issues on the railways have always been associated with this disaster in what was called the ‘lesson of Harmelen’.⁸¹⁹

As a consequence of the accident, Dutch Railways started to take measures to improve the security system of all railway tracks.⁸²⁰ In 1996, the railway tracks near the site of the accident were separated by a so called ‘fly-over’, in that way ‘obliterating’ the original site of the tragedy.

6.4 The Harmelen railway disaster monument: first impression



The Harmelen railway disaster monument

At the 50th ‘anniversary’ of the disaster in 2012, a monument was unveiled.

The focus of the design is on the victims who lost their lives. Their names are engraved in two slabs, made of black granite. These slabs are carved in a slightly cross like form, symbolizing the rail road switch where the collision took place. In between these slabs, a bronze female torso, symbolizing a ‘broken human being’, has been placed. This torso is placed on a console and refers to the victims. The choice of a female torso was made by the artist on purpose: a female symbolizes the passing on of life, in contrast with the place of the accident where so many lives were ended too soon.

⁸¹⁹ Testimony of Mr. Pieter van Vollenhoven in a documentary: *50 jaar treinramp Harmelen*, by Erwin Raasveld, broadcasted on January 8, 2012, by a local television station, RTV Utrecht, in collaboration with a nationwide television station, MAX, www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1213004, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸²⁰ VEENENDAAL: *Spoorwegen in Nederland. Van 1834 tot nu* 515-516.

The console is placed on a hard core plate, resembling the hard core in between railway tracks: approaching the monument is like entering the railway tracks.⁸²¹

Two plaques, made of bronze, are attached to the console and provide details of the disaster, like for instance the victims, the place, and weather circumstances.

Looking over the torso and in between the slabs, offers a view on the exact place of the collision.

6.5 The long road to the Harmelen monument

6.5.1 First 40 years: no monument

Immediately after the disaster, the erection of a monument was already discussed within the local community. The objective was to put a monument at the place of the disaster. However, the local mayor rejected the initiative, because it would be too dangerous to put a monument at the site of the collision. He also feared that it would be difficult to maintain the monument and suggested that time should be taken to calm down and to cope with emotions.⁸²²

Hans Fictoor explains that he is aware of the fact that already in 1962 a monument was mentioned:

‘At that time, I was not involved in this request. We were very much occupied with our own life, which had been turned upside down because of the death of my father. I remember, we were catholic, that I was sent at a pilgrimage to Lourdes. People from Dutch Railways organized that trip for me. But at that time, we were not interested in Harmelen, the place where it all happened.’⁸²³

6.5.2 The initiative to the monument

At January 8, 2002, at the 40th anniversary, the remembrance of the disaster was discussed at Dutch television in a current affairs program. The first phrases of the reporter were on the absence of a monument: ‘More and more the need is mentioned for a monument in remembrance of the victims of the disaster. Harmelen belongs to the community of Woerden and they have said that they will take the question into consideration.’⁸²⁴ At the same program, eyewitnesses were interviewed who testified about the horrible scenes of the disaster, and how they still had difficulties in coping with their emotions.

⁸²¹ *Cirkel rond voor de Jong*, interview *Algemeen Dagblad*, www.taekedejong.nl/artikel.html, accessed September 10, 2013.

⁸²² JANSON: *De treinramp bij Harmelen* 59.

⁸²³ ‘Ik was niet bij dat verzoek betrokken toen. Wij waren heel erg met ons eigen leven bezig toen dat helemaal op zijn kop stond door de dood van mijn vader. Ik herinner mij, we waren katholiek, dat ik op bedevaart naar Lourdes werd gestuurd. Mensen van de Nederlandse Spoorwegen hadden dat voor mij geregeld. Maar in die tijd waren wij niet geïnteresseerd in Harmelen, de plaats waar het allemaal was gebeurd.’

⁸²⁴ ‘Steeds vaker wordt de roep gehoord om een monument te plaatsen voor de slachtoffers van de ramp. De gemeente Woerden waar Harmelen onder valt heeft gezegd erover te zullen nadenken,’ current affairs program TROS, 2Vandaag, January 8, 2002, online: www.geschiedenis24.nl/speler.program.7109237.html, accessed September 18, 2013.

The local municipality of Woerden declined requests for a monument at that time and reasoned that, at local and regional level, no relation and no connection to the disaster was felt which would be an incentive to create a monument.⁸²⁵

6.5.3 The rationale of the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen (2004)⁸²⁶

In 2001, a small group of relatives of victims made their request for a monument with Dutch Railways. Dutch Railways refused this request for two reasons. The first reason was a safety issue: a monument near the railway tracks could jeopardize safety. Dutch Railways also worried about the precedent this monument could create: it would be undesirable to create a memorial culture in the vicinity of the railway tracks. The second reason was of a different order: Dutch Railways did not want their train operators to be confronted with memorials alongside the tracks.⁸²⁷

Already in the past this policy was observed, as may be learned from the absence of any memorial sign of two other railway accidents with a respectable amount of fatalities which took place before Harmelen. In 1918, in the vicinity of Weesp, a railway embankment collapsed causing a train to fall down the ramp: 41 people died and 42 were injured. In 1942, near Sliedrecht, one train bumped into another from the back side. A wrong signal was the cause of the accident. Eighteen people died and 62 were injured. Until Harmelen, these were the two accidents with the highest death toll in the history of Dutch Railways.⁸²⁸ Neither of these accidents have been marked with a commemorative sign.

However, Dutch Railways took the dynamics in memorial culture and the emerging of public commemoration rituals into consideration. They observed that the number of requests from relatives of victims of railway accidents and incidents, to erect a monument or a different form of memorial sign in remembrance of their deceased relative, was constantly increasing. Very often, these requests were related to specific places near the railroad tracks. These places are often designated by relatives by means of flowers, candles, and other signs of affection of their loved ones. Dutch Railways, considering the general development and ‘popularity’ of these grassroots memorials, recognized these requests and the importance of these memorials to relatives of the victims. However, from the view of safety on the railroad, Dutch Railways opposed to these memorials. But on the other hand, they also acknowledged the general emergence of ‘mourning and commemorating at the place of the accident.’⁸²⁹ As a ‘solution’, or ‘compromise’, the initiative was taken to raise a nationwide monument in remembrance of all people who had lost their life up and around the railways including staff, victims of railway accidents, and people who had committed suicide.⁸³⁰ In this respect, not only the

⁸²⁵ JANSON: *De treinramp bij Harmelen* 8.

⁸²⁶ ‘Nationwide monument railway accidents.’

⁸²⁷ Ton Honing, project manager corporate communications, Dutch Railways, personal communication, February 2012 and written information (unpublished) on the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen.

⁸²⁸ VEENENDAAL: *Spoorwegen in Nederland. Van 1834 tot nu* 346-347 and 441.

⁸²⁹ Ton Honing, personal communication and written information (unpublished) on the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen.

⁸³⁰ Ton Honing, personal communication and written information (unpublished) on the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen.

Harmelen accident would be included into the scope of the monument, but also past and more recent railroad accidents like the one near the city of Schiedam (1976, 24 people died, 15 people were injured) and Hoofddorp (1992, five people died and 33 were injured). Accidents which took the lives of personnel of Dutch Railways, for instance the accidents near Mook (1995) which took the life of three employees and an accident near Roermond (2003) in which the train operator lost his life, would also be included. The monument would also relate to any future victims of the railroads.

6.5.4 Objective

The objective of this monument would be to create a place where each, at his or her own time and in manner, would be able to commemorate. This place should be marked with an 'unpretentious' monument, and it should be centrally located and safely accessible. This monument would have to become a 'symbolic sign and a place of sorrow and emotion.'⁸³¹

6.5.5 Development of the monument

Together with a group of next of kin to victims of the Harmelen disaster, plans were elaborated to create one nationwide monument regarding all railroad accidents in the Netherlands. It would have to cover the railroad branch in total.

The following criterion regarding the design and construction of the monument was formulated:

- the monument should be easy to maintain, the materials used should be safe and solid.

The following qualitative criteria regarding the design were formulated:

- modest and fitting into the context of the surrounding area;
- symbolism should be concise and simple;
- cultural value: the design should be comprehensible for all;
- the design should be an invitation to reflection;
- the monument should be provided with a text reflecting depth and emotion.

The city of Utrecht, in the middle of the country and also the city where the headquarters of Dutch Railways are based, was chosen as the location for the monument.

The monument was designed by the Dutch artist Anton Broos (1953). The design is a representation of the 'dynamic of life and the stillness of death'.⁸³² The steel horizontal plate symbolizes life. This horizontal plate is connected to the 'stilled' circle and continues behind the circle, symbolizing those left behind who have to continue their lives. On the horizontal plate, a poem by Prof. Dr. Anne van der Meiden has been engraved:

⁸³¹ Ton Honing, personal communication and written information (unpublished) on the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen.

⁸³² *Kunstenaar Anton Broos luistert naar ijzeren ritmes met toevallige onderbrekingen*, in: *Trouw*, May 1, 2004, www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/1730184/2004/05/01/Kunstenaar-Anton-Broos-luistert-naar-ijzeren-ritmes-met-toevallige-onderbrekingen.dhtml, accessed September 13, 2013.

Herinneringen lopen samen op
 Met hen die op het spoor
 De wissel van de dood passeerden
 Met onze voeten meten wij verdriet en rouw
 Een lieve groet van dit verstild station
 Tot weerziens op de volgende bestemming

Memories go together
 With those who
 Crossed at the railway tracks the switch of death
 With our feet we measure grief and mourning
 A sweet goodbye from this stilled station
 We will meet again at the next destination

The poem was inspired by the design of the monument, with the aim to create a dialogue between design and text.

The monument is located in a little park in the vicinity of the head office of Dutch Railways and near kilometer marker zero of the national railway network.⁸³³ Approaching Utrecht from the east, the monument is visible from the train.



Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen, designed by Anton Broos (Utrecht, 2004)

⁸³³ TONNAER: 'Collective memorial rituals' 163-164.

The monument was dedicated in a memorial ceremony on April 16, 2004.

Whenever Dutch Railways learns about a fatality related to the railways, including suicides, a letter with condolences is sent to the relatives. In this letter, the monument is mentioned and the possibility of commemoration at the site of the monument is suggested.⁸³⁴ There is no yearly, general commemoration organized at the site of the monument. People may visit the monument on an individual basis for commemoration practices.

6.5.6 Meaning of the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen

Relatives of victims who had been involved in the development of the monument, testified on television about its meaning.⁸³⁵ Pieter de Jong, who lost his wife and his little daughter in the Harmelen accident, says that at the time it was not possible for him to go to the Buurkerk, where the coffins were placed in state. He did not wish the coffins of his family to be opened to say goodbye, as he wanted to retain the memory of how he had said goodbye to his wife and daughter at that early Monday morning. When he saw on television the pictures of the Bijlmer disaster in 1992, he got very emotional, as if his mourning process had started. He feels that with the monument, his wife and daughter have regained a 'face', and that feels good, according to De Jong.⁸³⁶

Elly Kamerbeek lost her father in the Harmelen disaster. She tells that at the time, there was no money to travel to Utrecht to attend the ceremony in the Buurkerk. It felt as if she had not been able to say goodbye to her father, because the coffin had already been closed when they buried her father at their local cemetery. When asked about the meaning of the monument, she says that the loss of her father had hurt her deeply, and that it would never be possible to put an end to this hurting. However, she trusts that the monument, and more specifically the text of the poem which relates to what comes after death, will offer some relief. She feels that the monument is a recognition that his death has not been for nothing.⁸³⁷

Jan Zoethout was one of the injured passengers. He had been trapped in the wreckage for more than six hours and was in a coma for a long time. He still suffers daily from his handicaps as a result of the accident. He could not imagine that he could be moved by the monument, but at the dedication ceremony of the monument, he declares that the monument really means very much to him.⁸³⁸

At the occasion of the recording of the television program, the three of them paid, for the first time after all these years, a visit to the site of the accident.

⁸³⁴ Ton Honing, personal communication and written information (unpublished) on the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen.

⁸³⁵ Documentary on the Harmelen railway disaster and the meaning of the Utrecht monument, Kruispunt KRO, April 18, 2004: www.geschiedenis24.nl/speler.program.7109237.html.

⁸³⁶ Kruispunt KRO, April 18, 2004: www.geschiedenis24.nl/speler.program.7109237.html. The development of the *Landelijk monument spoorwegongevallen* had stirred up emotions again and consequently was the reason why he did not want to participate in my research project. Of course, I had wanted to ask him what the Harmelen monument meant to him.

⁸³⁷ Kruispunt KRO, April 18, 2004: www.geschiedenis24.nl/speler.program.7109237.html.

⁸³⁸ Kruispunt KRO, April 18, 2004: www.geschiedenis24.nl/speler.program.7109237.html.

6.5.7 A ‘general’ monument or a ‘specific’ monument

A relevant question that needs to be answered is why there was still a demand for a specific monument after the general monument to railway victims, the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen had been erected in 2004. Did this general monument not meet the needs of people closely involved with the Harmelen crash? In this respect, Hans Fictoor holds the opinion that the victims of the Harmelen disaster deserve more attention, and he thinks this is a justified statement when nowadays commemoration ceremonies are held for disasters, like for instance the Bijlmer disaster. However, the death toll of Harmelen was higher and he thinks it is important that these victims should not be forgotten.⁸³⁹

Fictoor does not appreciate the nationwide and general monument because no names of victims are mentioned at this monument. He calls it an ‘anonymous’ monument. In his perspective, it is much more important to have a monument at the site of the disaster and dedicated exclusively to the victims of Harmelen.⁸⁴⁰

As said before, the place of the disaster is nowadays a central spot for commemoration practices. This might explain why, with regard to railway disasters in the Netherlands, a general monument like the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen was not satisfactory to (some) people related to the Harmelen crash, who wanted to have a specific monument near the place of the accident.

The policy of Dutch Railways regarding a general monument for all victims relates to a ‘trend’ in monument culture, which is discussed by Judith Tonnaer in her work on collective memorial rituals.⁸⁴¹ In this study she mentions a variety of collective monuments, which she calls ‘fellow sufferer’s monuments’: regarding victims of AIDS, traffic, cancer, policemen and air force pilots who died in action, and people who decided to donate their remains for science purposes. At some of these monuments, yearly commemoration ceremonies are organized, other monuments do not have these ceremonies.

Some of these monuments, like for instance the Nationaal Brandweer Monument (National Fire Fighters Monument), offer a possibility to indicate the name of a particular victim at the yearly ceremony.⁸⁴² The fact that their deceased relatives are mentioned at the monument, offers recognition and comfort. This is not possible regarding the railway victims monument, nor is there a yearly memorial ceremony.

This might be a second explanation regarding the relatively unfamiliarity of the monument with people involved in the Harmelen monument, and the necessity they felt to have their ‘own’ place and monument instead of a general, nationwide, and involving all railway accidents including suicides.

⁸³⁹ *Harmelen herdenken met een boek*, in: *Algemeen Dagblad*, www.ad.nl/ad/nl/1039/Utrecht/article/detail/2131714/2008/08/29/Harmelen-herdenken-met-boek.dhtml, accessed September 19, 2013.

⁸⁴⁰ Hans Fictoor, personal communication, February 1, 2012.

⁸⁴¹ TONNAER: ‘Collective memorial rituals’; TONNAER: *Bomen voor het leven*.

⁸⁴² www.brandweermonument.nl, accessed September 30, 2013; NETTEN & TE BRAKE: ‘Herdenken en monumenten sterk met elkaar verbonden’.

6.5.8 The initiative to the Harmelen monument

And with the 50th anniversary of the disaster coming up in 2012, (again) voices were heard to initiate a monument in the vicinity of Harmelen. This decision was influenced by a question from a regional television channel about the way this 50th anniversary would be ‘celebrated’. In 2008, Fictoor finished what he calls his own ‘monument’ in remembrance of his father. He published his family history focusing on the Harmelen disaster, and in 2009 he started his own website.⁸⁴³ This site turned into a nationwide ‘forum’ for all people who had, in one way or the other, been related to the Harmelen disaster. When the mayor of Woerden (in the meantime Harmelen had become part of the city of Woerden) following the emerging attention on the disaster, was asked in 2010 to organize the 50th commemoration, he had concerns whether this would open up ‘old wounds’ and whether January 8, 1962, would still be present in the memory of the public. But he received an overwhelming amount of positive emails. The chairman of the Harmelen community platform, Ed Janson, was asked to initiate a monument and to organize a day of commemoration. The memorial site would be unveiled on January 8, 2012, exactly 50 years after the disaster. Financial support came from several parties and also, after much debate because of their policy regarding the nationwide monument, from Dutch Railways.⁸⁴⁴

Not only a monument, but also a memorial book was part of the 50th commemoration. In November 2011, a memorial book was presented with recently found pictures of the tragedy and the salvation procedure. A regional television channel, together with a nationwide channel for elderly people, produced a documentary which was broadcasted on January 8, 2012. They also opened a chat box on the internet where people could put reactions. As a result, people from all over the country who had been involved one way or the other, started to communicate with each other about their experiences.

6.5.9 The monument: design and symbolism

A local sculptor, Taeke de Jong (1948), was invited to design the monument. His father, a general practitioner in a nearby village, had been closely involved in the salvaging of the victims. De Jong remembers that his father, being the local doctor, had to assist in identifying the bodies and also in gathering the bodies who had been assembled in a church in Utrecht, the *Buurkerk*.⁸⁴⁵ His father had been deeply, emotionally hurt by his experiences that day. This affected to a great extent his father’s life afterwards. At the time, there were hardly any possibilities to talk about the experiences. People just went on with their life and did not take time to reflect on what had happened. The remembrance of how the disaster affected his father, obviously influenced De Jong’s design of the monument. Design-

⁸⁴³ www.hansfictoor.nl, accessed February 10, 2012, at the moment (2013) the website has been ‘hacked’ and is not accessible.

⁸⁴⁴ *NS wil geen monument treinramp: Algemeen Dagblad*, February 10, 2009, www.ad.nl/ad/nl/1039/Utrecht/article/detail/1997408/2009/02/10/NS-wil-geen-monument-treinramp.dhtml?redirected, accessed September 19, 2013. In this article one of the spokesmen of Dutch Railways stated that they appreciated emotions but that it was impossible for them to put monuments everywhere. Later on they decided to leave this policy.

⁸⁴⁵ *Cirkel rond voor de Jong*, interview *Algemeen Dagblad*, www.taekedejong.nl/artikel.html, accessed September 10, 2013.

ing the monument is also a way of honouring his father, who afterwards never wanted to talk about his feelings again.



Female torso, Harmelen railway disaster monument

The focus in the monument is on the victims. De Jong considers the human aspect, and not the material and financial damage of trains and other objects, most important. The design would therefore have to relate to the victims and be integrated into the place of the accident, thereby creating a *lieu de mémoire* for all victims and their relatives. He realizes that this is for many people involved, a very late, or in terms of this research project, a postponed monument.

De Jong says that being a sculptor means that he has the intention to keep things alive, and that is exactly his intention with this monument: keeping the remembrance of the disaster alive, and in that way recognizing the loss of the relatives of the victims.

6.5.10 Inauguration ceremony

The local community organized the memorial ceremony on January 8, 2012. A lot of effort was put into the difficult task of finding, after such a long period of time, descendants of victims, people who had been injured, or train passengers who had been unharmed. About 600 people attended the ceremony. Sixty-one of the 93 deadly victims were represented at the ceremony. The goal of the ceremony

was in the first place, in a brief official ceremony and speeches, to unveil the monument. But also, and maybe more important, to accommodate a sharing of experiences and emotions between relatives of victims, survivors, passengers, caregivers, and eyewitnesses. A short documentary with live images from the site of the collision and the salvage was shown. Many people saw each other, maybe for the first time, after all those years.

Unfortunately, some of the names on the plaques were misspelled, or dates of birth turned out to be wrong. This was mainly caused by the fact that at the time in 1962, these mistakes were made in official documents in which the fatalities were listed. Again, a lot of effort was put in by local people to check all the names and more mistakes were found. Several weeks after the ceremony it was decided to put new plaques with the proper names in front of the old plaques.⁸⁴⁶

6.5.11 The objective and meaning of the monument

The intention of the monument was to create a place for all people involved in the tragedy, to visit and commemorate the disaster and its aftermath. For that reason, it was essential that the names would be on the memorial, and that the place of the memorial would overlook the actual site of the accident. Main objective was to commemorate the 50th ‘anniversary’ of the train crash and to honour, not only the victims, but also local people, medical personnel, and all others who were active in the rescue and salvation procedures. Since the objective was to create a place of commemoration of the deceased and a ‘meeting place’ for relatives and other people involved, it was never considered to name the monument.⁸⁴⁷

January 8 has always been a difficult day in the Fictoor family: ‘It was always a hard day. We did not discuss it, but the atmosphere was stale, it was hidden so to say. It was the same on the birthday of my father.’⁸⁴⁸ This has changed with the erection of the monument, as Hans Fictoor says: ‘At last, after 50 years, we have a place to visit on my father’s birthday, or to go to on the day of the accident.’⁸⁴⁹ He considers the monument as ‘some kind of closure’.

Kees van der Meer says: ‘This monument should have been here much earlier, but I think that many people will benefit from it.’⁸⁵⁰

‘It is also a place of recognition of what has happened there, a marking of the place,’ says Bob Kradolfer, one of the train passengers who left the train unharmed.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁴⁶ *Correctie monument Harmelen*, March 2, 2012, www.nos.nl/artikel/347188-correctie-monument-harmelen.html, accessed September 19, 2013.

⁸⁴⁷ Ed Janson, initiator of the Harmelen monument, personal communication, September 12, 2013.

⁸⁴⁸ ‘Het was altijd een moeilijke dag, er werd niet over gesproken maar er hing een bedompt sfeertje. Het werd gewoon een beetje verstopt moet ik zeggen, hetzelfde geldt voor de verjaardag van mijn vader.’ Hans Fictoor, personal communication, February 1, 2012.

⁸⁴⁹ Hans Fictoor, personal communication, February 2012.

⁸⁵⁰ ‘Dit monument had er veel eerder moeten zijn, maar ik denk dat het ook nu nog veel mensen ten goede zal komen,’ in: *Het was over tot de orde van de dag* in: *Trouw*, January 7, 2012, www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/archief/article/detail/3109601/2012/01/07/Het-was-over-tot-de-orde-van-de-dag.dhtml, accessed September 18, 2013.

⁸⁵¹ ‘Het is ook een plaats van erkenning van wat er destijds is gebeurd, een markering van de plaats.’ Bob Kradolfer, personal communication, February 2012.

Unless requests come up from people directly involved, the municipality has no plans to organize yearly ceremonies around the memorial. The idea was to create a public designation of the place of the tragedy, and offer a space for individual commemoration.

Although a minority showed disappointment about the mistakes, people are satisfied with the monument: 'I am glad it is finally there. It is beautiful. Impressive. And the corpus? Probably that is the way it was....,' says Hans Fictoor. 'A place to visit with my grandchildren and to tell them what happened to grandpa and how lucky he was to get out.'⁸⁵²

6.6 The Harmelen railway disaster monument: a postponed monument

6.6.1 Disaster monuments

This paragraph will discuss the issues relevant to the 'postponement' of the monument. I will consider these issues in the context of disaster ritual. In this respect, a first issue that needs consideration is the general disaster ritual repertoire at the time of the Harmelen disaster in 1962, in particular with regard to the erection of a monument: did a monument belong to the usual ritual repertoire after a disaster at the time of the Harmelen crash?

6.6.2 Other disasters at the time: 1945-1962

The following list of disasters (see next page), which occurred in the period after the Second World War until 1962, the year of Harmelen, was published on the internet and provides us with an overview of disasters in the years before Harmelen.⁸⁵³ This period was chosen because before the Second World War we could hardly speak of a 'monument culture' in the Netherlands. As stated in Chapter 1, the commemoration and remembrance of the Second World War resulted in a 'boost' of monuments and the start of a present-day monument culture which seems to have no limits regarding form, symbolism, and objectives.

The disasters referred to in the table, occurred all at Dutch territory. As well, in the same period, disasters with Dutch involvement occurred outside of the Netherlands.⁸⁵⁴ These disasters were mainly air crashes or naval accidents. Although the focus of my search was on disaster monuments which occurred on Dutch territory, I searched for Dutch monuments regarding these disasters on foreign grounds, but have not been able to locate any.

After exploration of various source materials the following information was found:

⁸⁵² 'Ik ben blij dat het er eindelijk is. Het is prachtig. Indrukwekkend. En het corpus? Waarschijnlijk was het zo. Een plaats om te bezoeken met mijn kleinkinderen en hen te vertellen wat er met opa is gebeurd en hoe veel geluk hij heeft gehad dat hij hier veilig uit kwam.' Hans Fictoor, personal communication, February 2012.

⁸⁵³ A list of Dutch disasters may be found at the site of *Zwaailichten.org*, www.zero-meridean.nl/index.php, accessed September 13, 2013.

⁸⁵⁴ A list of disasters outside the Netherlands but with a huge Dutch involvement (meaning many Dutch victims) may be found at the site of *Zwaailichten.org*, www.zero-meridean.nl/index.php, accessed September 13, 2013.

Date	Description	Death toll	Monument at the time	Postponed monument
June 16, 1946	Ship collides with mine, North Sea	12 (2 Dutch)	No	No
October 7, 1946	Air crash Apeldoorn	23	1948 and 1949	Yearly commemoration
November 14, 1946	Air crash Schiphol	26 (20 Dutch)	No	No
January 17, 1947	Explosion gunpowder factory, Muiden	17	No	2006: memorial plaque, initiatives for a monument
March 24, 1947	Mine disaster, Brunssum	13	No	2010
February 12, 1950	Naval disaster Finnish freight carrier Karhula	11 (no Dutch)	No	No
February 1, 1953	Watersnoodramp, flooding Zeeland and Zuid-Holland	1836	1953	2003: Nationaal Monument Watersnood 1953
September 29, 1954	Bus crash, Valkenburg	19 (1 Dutch) ⁸⁵⁵	1954: memorial plaque	No
January 8, 1962	Railway disaster Harmelen	93	No	2012

Disasters on Dutch territory 1945-1962

[source: *Zwaailichten.org*, www.zero-meridean.nl/index.php]

This exploration is not meant as an exhaustive overview, and most certainly will not cover all disasters in the period between 1946 and 1962. This list is a result of information on disasters published in the media, and it may serve as an example of disasters in that period with a big impact on people and their environment. They all fall within the working definition of a disaster as provided by Post *et al.*: there was a major, extensive destruction and human suffering, the calamity was collective in nature and involved a sudden and unexpected occurrence.⁸⁵⁶

Remarkably, two disasters in this period, the Harmelen railway disaster and the Watersnoodramp, remain the disasters with the highest death toll on Dutch territory up and till today.

⁸⁵⁵ Eighteen Belgian victims and one Dutch victim.

⁸⁵⁶ POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual* 246.

I explored also whether any postponed monuments have been raised in the public area with regard to these disasters. A description of the disaster, of commemoration practices, and an overview of the various monuments, will be presented hereafter.

Air crash Apeldoorn, 1946

A disaster with a huge local impact was a plane crash which occurred in the city of Apeldoorn in 1946. On October 7 of that year, an airplane crashed on the gymnasium of a Christian high school in the town of Apeldoorn, killing 22 pupils and the pilot of the airplane. Five pupils were injured. The coffins with the bodies were ceremonially placed in state in the school. A communal funeral ceremony was held in a local church and all boys, except two, were buried at the same time at the local Christian cemetery.

A week after the tragedy, classes were resumed. In 1948, a simple tombstone like monument was erected at the cemetery. At the monument, the two names of the boys who were buried at other cemeteries have been engraved. In 1949, a memorial plaque with the names of victims was unveiled in the school.

At the time of the tragedy, the ritual commemorative practices were provided by the Christian signature of the school. The local community was deeply involved, also because the pilot of the airplane happened to be a man, 23 years old, from the same town, Apeldoorn. He had flown to his hometown, as was assumed at that time, to greet his mother from the air. She had never seen him flying in his airplane. Over Apeldoorn he had been flying in circles for some time before crashing on the gymnasium. Many local people witnessed the accident, making the impact on the community even bigger. When his mother saw the airplane crash and understood what had happened, she had a heart attack and died soon after. Many questions were raised about, what was called in the newspapers, the 'reckless' behaviour of the pilot, whom however had been a Second World War hero and had been decorated for his deeds the year before.⁸⁵⁷

Although the site of the accident was 'sanctified' by a memorial sign, the accident itself was never discussed among people closely involved. Nor was it ever made clear what could have caused the crash: had it been a fault of the pilot or had there been a mechanical problem with the plane? A week after the accident, classes were resumed as if nothing had happened and the students were not supposed to discuss the accident. It was a difficult time for the boys who had survived, but lost all their classmates.⁸⁵⁸ Within the family of the pilot, the accident was also silenced. Friends of his younger brother were in fact 'forbidden' to speak about the accident.⁸⁵⁹

The fact that there was a strong local embedding of the plane crash and of its consequences, had an effect on the ritual repertoire after this disaster. The victims were all from the same community and the same Christian high school. The commemorative ritual repertoires were provided by religious institu-

⁸⁵⁷ CHRISTERN: *Het ongeluk van oom Max. Een familiegeschiedenis* 8-9.

⁸⁵⁸ COMMISSIE GEDENKBOEK VLIEGTUIGRAMP 1946: 7-10-1946 / *Waarom?* 67.

⁸⁵⁹ CHRISTERN: *Het ongeluk van Oom Max. Een familiegeschiedenis* 78.

tions as was the usual practice at the time. There was little incentive or creativity to deviate from these protocols.

If we consider other disasters at that time, for instance the Schiphol plane crash which also took place in 1946, a month after the Apeldoorn crash, killing 26, we see a different commemoration practice: (mostly) individual burials, no commemoration after one or later years, and no additional public attention. Except with regard to a well-known Dutch writer, Herman de Man, who was among the victims and whose funeral received nationwide attention.⁸⁶⁰ Three Dutch members of the crew were buried in a communal grave at the Amsterdam cemetery Zorgvlied.⁸⁶¹

The absence of a monument to this crash may be explained by the fact that there was no local connection to the accident. The passengers originated from different places in the Netherlands and the absence of some sort of 'attachment' to the site of the crash, like there was in Apeldoorn. These elements may also explain why no information could be found on commemorative practices of the collision of a ship at the North Sea in June, 1946.

After the Apeldoorn crash, yearly memorial ceremonies were organized at the anniversary of the crash.

A year after the 40th commemoration, in 1987, a memorial book was published with testimonies of survivors and family of victims.⁸⁶² In 2001, after the fire disaster in a Volendam pub on New Year's Eve, which took the life of 14 young people, a radio documentary was made.⁸⁶³ In this documentary, an eyewitness and a survivor, both testified that the Volendam disaster resembled their own experiences and aroused, again, deeply felt emotions. They explained how they had not been able to talk about their experiences at the time and how the disaster was silenced by family and friends. They were told that they had to be grateful they survived, and to go on with their life.

Nowadays, every year at October 7, a commemoration ceremony is organized at the school by pupils of the second grade, the same grade which almost completely 'disappeared' after the crash in 1946. The supervisor of the school is convinced that commemoration is meaningful to the pupils and to the relatives of the deceased. And also the pilot and his mother have become part of the commemoration ceremony. The objective of this ceremony is to commemorate and support each other, to hear each other's stories, and to share emotions.

After a long period of silence, there is also room to listen to the story of the perpetrator. In 2011, a nephew of the pilot published a book on the life of his uncle with the aim to correct the picture of his uncle as a 'reckless' pilot. There had never been a possibility to find out what exactly could have caused the plane to crash. The writer suggests, and offers testimony, that there could have been a me-

⁸⁶⁰ www.aviacrash.nl/paginas/ph-tbw.htm, accessed February 2012.

⁸⁶¹ www.aviacrash.nl/paginas/ph-tbw.htm, accessed September 30, 2013.

⁸⁶² COMMISSIE GEDENKBOEK VLIEGTUIGRAMP 1946: 7-10-1946 / *Waarom?*

⁸⁶³ www.geschiedenis24.nl/ovt/afleveringen/2001/Ovt-14-01-2001/Vliegtuigramp-in-Apeldoorn-1946.html, accessed September 24, 2013.

chanical problem with the plane.⁸⁶⁴ He is now able to discuss this in public and is offered a podium at the yearly commemoration in Apeldoorn. On October 7, 2013, he published an article on his uncle Max in a nationwide newspaper.⁸⁶⁵ He holds the opinion that the story of the disaster is still very much alive, and that the need to commemorate remains because it is important to know the story behind an accident like this air crash. It is also important to have a better understanding what relatives of deceased have been experiencing throughout the years. He concludes, that shortly after the Second World War, there was hardly any room for mourning and coming to terms with this immense grief. For that reason it remains important to reflect on these issues, even two generations afterwards.

Explosion gunpowder factory, Muiden, 1947

On January 17, 1947, a big amount of Second World War German grenades exploded at the premises of a gunpowder factory. These grenades had been brought to the factory by men from the Dutch army to be defused in the factory. One of the grenades exploded and this caused a chain reaction of explosions of all grenades. Fourteen soldiers were killed instantly and one survived. Three employees of the factory were also killed. Two of them were buried together, the other victims were buried individually at their local places. No monument was raised at the site of the explosion.

In 2006, for the first time, a commemoration was organized by a small local committee, initiated by a local history study group. The intention was made public to organize a year later, in 2007, when it would be 60 years ago, a large-scale commemoration, including the erection of a monument.⁸⁶⁶ At the first commemoration, in 2006, a small memorial plaque with a modest text, 'In remembrance of January 17, 1947 - Committee '47', was placed at the site where the explosion took place. Only a limited group of relatives of victims, local authorities, and others attended the ceremony.

A discussion was started whether a general monument, instead of a specific monument, should be raised regarding all victims due to various explosions during the time the factory was in operation.⁸⁶⁷

According to a local spokesman, there was also opposition from relatives of the victims. The local committee decided it was apparently not the right moment for a monument and it 'dissolved' itself. The objective is now to have a 'general' monument to all 41 deadly victims of the factory at a later time.⁸⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the memorial plaque disappeared for unknown reasons only one day after it had been placed.

Coal mine disaster, Brunssum, 1947

In 1947, a fire in one of the coal mines of the Netherlands in Brunssum, Staatsmijn Hendrik, took the life of 13 miners. Back in 1928, there had been an explosion in the same mine which also took the life

⁸⁶⁴ CHRISTERN: *Het ongeluk van oom Max. Een familiegeschiedenis* (Rotterdam 2012) 82-83.

⁸⁶⁵ CHRISTERN: 'Het ongeluk van oom Max.'

⁸⁶⁶ www.ham-muiden.nl/klap/klap01.htm, accessed September 30, 2013.

⁸⁶⁷ www.geschiedenis24.nl/speler.program.7069401.html, accessed September 30, 2013.

⁸⁶⁸ Personal communication G. Kroon, *Historisch Archief Muiden*, September 30, 2013.

of 13 miners. In 1963, the mine was closed and in 2010, a monument was erected at the former main entrance. In 2007, the 60th anniversary of the disaster was commemorated for the first time during a ceremony.⁸⁶⁹ At that time, the erection of a monument was not an issue. Three years later, the opinion had apparently changed and a monument was raised in 2010, honouring all 178 victims of mine accidents. On March 25, 2012, to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the disaster, a memorial service in church, lightening of candles for each victim, and a memorial service at the monument were organized. When asked in 2012, former miners told that at the time, those disasters were never discussed at home, nor were they a reason not to go working in the mines.⁸⁷⁰ They felt recognized at last by the recent commemoration activities and of course, by the monument.

De Watersnoodramp, February 1, 1953

A ‘natural’ disaster with a huge, nationwide felt impact was the flood disaster in 1953, called *De Watersnoodramp*, (‘The flooding disaster’). Up and till today *De Watersnoodramp* remains the biggest disaster of the Netherlands. This flooding took place on February 1, 1953, and hit a big part of the provinces Zeeland and Zuid-Holland. The impact of the disaster was enormous: 1,836 people were killed and many thousands lost everything they owned. People from all over the country participated in the rescue and salvage of the victims. Many refugees found shelter with volunteers in other parts of the country. Charity was organized at a big scale in support of the victims.⁸⁷¹

In the years after the disaster, commemoration of the victims was organized on a local scale through ceremonies in church, and by monuments and memorial plaques. Every village hit by the flood would have its own monument. At least 70 monuments have been raised at the time.⁸⁷² Many villages and towns in the disaster area were ‘adopted’ by other Dutch towns and villages. These communities often took the initiative to a monument and artists were invited to design monuments. This resulted in a variety of monuments not limited to the more usual commemorative plaque with names or monuments resembling graveyard tombstones. For instance, two villages at Schouwen-Duiveland, Nieuwerkerk and Oudkerk, were adopted by the city of Enschede in the eastern part of the Netherlands. At the time of the flooding, the Dutch sculptor Mari Andriessen (1897-1979), was in the process of designing a war monument to this city. This monument was unveiled in May 1953. The city municipality assigned Andriessen with the design of monuments to both the villages of Nieuwerkerk and Oudkerk. Both monuments were placed in 1958 at the local graveyards where the victims were buried.⁸⁷³

Already in the same year of the flooding, in 1953, a memorial book *De ramp* was published; the benefits would go to a fund, the Nationaal Rampenfonds, thus to the victims. In her preface to this book, her majesty Queen Wilhelmina mentioned the cooperation between the Dutch people to help

⁸⁶⁹ www.geschiedenis24.nl/ovt/afleveringen/2007/Ovt-25-03-2007/Mijnramp-Brunssum.html, accessed September 21, 2013.

⁸⁷⁰ *Herdenking mijnramp*, www.demijnen.nl/actueel/artikel/herdenking-mijnramp, accessed September 21, 2013.

⁸⁷¹ SLAGER: *De ramp. Een reconstructie van de watersnood van 1953* 495.

⁸⁷² ZUIDERENT: *Na de watersnood. Schrijvers en dichters en de ramp van 1953* 17.

⁸⁷³ TILANUS: De beeldhouwer Mari Andriessen 109-111.

and assist those in need. According to the Queen, the book should be a remembrance of those horrible days in February, 1953, and a small ‘monument’ to the solidarity among the Dutch.⁸⁷⁴

But at the same time, the disaster was considered ‘an act of God’ and impossible to speak about.⁸⁷⁵ This may be the reason that a documentary, which was made regarding the 50th commemoration in 2003, was called *De vergeten ramp* (‘The forgotten disaster’).⁸⁷⁶ This flooding has been a disaster with the biggest death toll in the Netherlands ever since and until today. At regular times, commemoration of the disaster is organized and in accordance with current commemoration practices, for instance a museum, a national monument and also a digital monument have been raised.

On November 6, 2003, 50 years after the last dike had been repaired, a national monument, Nationaal Monument Watersnood 1953, was unveiled. This monument also comprises a museum and an oral history project with the objective to record testimonies of eyewitnesses.⁸⁷⁷ A digital monument, named 1835+1, is also included in this national monument. The objective of this digital monument is to remember and honour the victims of the flooding, not only by name, but also through pictures and stories.⁸⁷⁸

1835+1

Een plaats voor herinneringen aan slachtoffers van de watersnood 1953

Slachtoffers Watersnood 1953 / Nieuwerkerk / Johannes Aalbregtse

Naam	Plaats	
Aalbregtse, Johannes	Nieuwerkerk	4
Aalbregtse, Jacoba	Nieuwerkerk	4
Adriaanse-van der Have, Levina	Brouwershaven	
Agterdenbos, Cornelis	Fijnaart	
Agterdenbos, Johannes	Fijnaart	
Agterdenbos, Lodewijk	Fijnaart	
Agterdenbos-Slikboer, Adriana Wilhelmina	Fijnaart	
Appel, Hendrik	Middelhamnis	

Johannes Aalbregtse

uit Nieuwerkerk, geboren op 19 december 1919

Er zijn 4 herinneringen aan Johannes Aalbregtse opgetekend in deze site.

Klik [hier](#) om zelf een herinnering aan Johannes Aalbregtse toe te voegen.

Het was mijn vader

Een herinnering van Cobie Aalbregtse

Johannes Aalbregtse, geboren 19 december 1919 en gestorven 1 februari 1953. Hij was mijn vader, tijdens de watersnoodramp is hij met mijn zus Jacoba (Cobie) Aalbregtse verdronken.

Mijn vader was getrouwd met Gerrie van Laatum uit Dordrecht. Mijn moeder was toen zwanger van mijn broer en van mij. Wij zijn geboren 1 september 1953, Joop (Johannes Jan) en ik Cobie (Jacoba Dirkje Wilhelmina).

Ik wist er voordien wel wat van maar na het overlijden van mijn stiefvader is mijn moeder er pas goed over gaan praten. Ik ben toen met haar naar Oosterland gegaan. Zij heeft mij de plek aangewezen aan de Kempensweg waar de boerderij heeft gestaan en ook de boom waarin zij zich in veiligheid kon brengen. Het huis er schuin tegenover waar ze uiteindelijk is gered staat er ook nog. Het is nu een restaurant, daarvoor was het een standplaats voor vrachtwagens en eetgelegenheden.

Ik zou het fijn vinden om in contact te komen met familie.

Het vriendelijke groeten: Cobie Lam - Aalbregtse, Zwaanweg 18, 3985 PL, Werkhoven, provincie Utrecht. E-mail: cobieaalbregtse@hotmail.com

Plaats van overlijden van de slachtoffers

Plaatsnaam	
's-Gravendeel	37
Abbenbroek	1
Brandwijk	2
Brouwershaven	4
Bruinisse	1 1
Burgh	10
Den Bommel	9
Dinteloord	8
Dordrecht	2

Mijn moeder, Gerrie van Laatum, mijn zusje Jacoba (Cobie) en mijn vader, Johannes Aalbregtse. Volgens mijn moeder is deze foto ongeveer gemaakt in 1952, mijn zusje was toen ruim een jaar.

Digital monument to ‘De ramp’⁸⁷⁹

⁸⁷⁴ *De ramp*: this book was a cooperative production of Dutch book publishers and published in Amsterdam in 1953.

⁸⁷⁵ LEYDESDORFF: *Het water en de herinnering*; ROSENTHAL & SAEIJS: *Getuige de ramp*; ZUIDERENT: *Na de watersnood. Schrijvers en dichters en de ramp van 1953*.

⁸⁷⁶ ROSENTHAL & SAEIJS: *Getuige de ramp* 7.

⁸⁷⁷ www.watersnoodmuseum.nl/NL/algemeen/nationaal-monument, accessed September 30, 2013 and www.1953hetverhaal.nl, accessed September 30, 2013.

⁸⁷⁸ www.deramp.nl, accessed September 30, 2013.

⁸⁷⁹ www.deramp.nl, accessed September 30, 2013.

Valkenburg bus crash, 1954

In 1954, in the southern town of Valkenburg, a bus crashed against the so called Mergelmonument, right in the middle of town. The cause of the accident was a failure of the breaks when going down a very steep hill, the Cauberg, right into the centre of town. Eighteen passengers and one local inhabitant were killed. The passengers originated from two villages in Belgium. Local people were active in the rescue and salvation of the victims. Shortly after the accident, a simple, memorial plaque made of wood, with the names of the victims, was placed near the site of the crash. Many years later this plaque was replaced by a new one.⁸⁸⁰ In 2013, this plaque has been removed to the renewed glass entrance of the so called Valkenburg ruins, the ruins of an ancient castle. Although hardly visible for the general public, it remains in place.



Monument to the Valkenburg bus crash

6.6.3 In conclusion

Within this period, three disasters (Apeldoorn, Valkenburg, and the Watersnoodramp) were commemorated by means of a monument raised shortly after the disaster. The air crash in Apeldoorn in 1947 and the bus crash in Valkenburg in 1964, were both commemorated by simple monuments: memorial plaques (Apeldoorn and Valkenburg) and a tombstone monument (Apeldoorn). Only with regard to the Watersnoodramp, artists were asked to design monuments and a variety in form and symbolism of monuments was developed.

Issues that seem to be relevant are:

- local connection to the disaster: local impact like victims or rescuers from the vicinity;
- the site of the disaster: in the middle of the community or a faraway place.

How does Harmelen ‘fit in’ after this analysis of commemoration practice related to disasters in the Netherlands in the same period?

Few of the victims in the Harmelen disaster originated from Harmelen or its vicinity. In comparison with the plane crash in Apeldoorn where all the victims were students at the same school, or the bus accident in Valkenburg where the accident took place in the middle of town and the site of the accident was visible to the whole community, there was no immediate or specific reason to commemorate the site or a specific person. However, regarding the impact of the crash and salvation procedures on

⁸⁸⁰ www.tvvalkenburg.nl/Busongeluk-1954.11015.0.html, accessed February 2012.

local people, some kind of memorial sign could have been expected. It is stated that in the aftermath of the disaster, voices were heard to mark the site with a monument. Because the precise place is a far-away site in the fields, the idea was soon abandoned; it would be impossible and even dangerous for people to visit this place.

Hans Fictoor explains the absence of a monument as follows. In his view the war time period had a negative effect with regard to how people handled the Harmelen disaster:

‘1962 is rather close after the Second World War, millions of people died at that time. And after the war we lived in a time where you did not complain, you just went on working, and that was also the case with the Harmelen disaster. It was thought to be all over soon and back to business as usual.’⁸⁸¹

Probably this statement clarifies best why no monument was raised in the aftermath of the disaster: it was back to business and all would be over in next to no time.

6.7 Monuments with regard to current and past disasters

In this last paragraph, I will explore whether the postponed Harmelen monument may be regarded as an example of an emerging trend in disaster ritual commemorative practices, or that this monument is just a unique phenomenon. I will try to find an answer to the following question: a monument is one of the ‘pillars’ of the present disaster ritual repertoire, is this also the case regarding disasters in the past?

6.7.1 Four fixed pillars of disaster rituals

In their work on disaster ritual, Post *et al.* explore how rituals may be used as a coping strategy for victims of a disaster. The authors focus on rituals associated with disasters in the period from 1990 to 2001. As they indicate, the choice of this period has been a ‘purely pragmatic choice’.⁸⁸² They conclude to an emerging new ritual repertoire with the umbrella term ‘collective commemoration ritual’. Disaster ritual, as a type of public commemoration ritual, falls within the scope of this emerging new ritual repertoire.⁸⁸³ The authors conclude that: ‘The ritual repertoire after a disaster in the Netherlands in the period we have defined is strikingly coherent and orderly.’⁸⁸⁴ This repertoire consists of what they call ‘four fixed pillars’: silent procession, collective service of remembrance, monument, and annual commemoration. These are the four basic elements of disaster ritual repertoire and they will be put in depending on the circumstances of the disaster.

⁸⁸¹ ‘1962 is vrij dicht op de Tweede Wereldoorlog, miljoenen mensen zijn toen gestorven. En na de oorlog is het natuurlijk een kwestie geweest van niet zeuren, je ging door met werken en dat was ook het geval toen met Harmelen, men dacht dat het allemaal voorbij was en men ging snel weer over tot de orde van de dag.’ Hans Fictoor, personal communication, February 1, 2012.

⁸⁸² POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual* 28.

⁸⁸³ POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual* 5-10.

⁸⁸⁴ POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual* 246.

More than a decade after the period studied by Post *et al.* (1990-2001), the pillar ‘monument’ seems to have maintained its firm place in disaster ritual repertoire. Nowadays, almost without exception, the site of a disaster will shortly after the event be turned into a grassroots memorial site. The most ‘famous’ grassroots site worldwide will probably be Ground Zero at the place of the 9/11 attacks in New York City. And after a year, at the first anniversary of a disaster, most probable a ceremony will be held at the site of the disaster and a monument will be erected in remembrance of the victims.

With regard to the Netherlands, this process is best illustrated by Dutch examples of the recent years. A first example is the (failed) attack by a car driver on the royal family in the city of Apeldoorn on Queen’s Day in 2009. This attack could be watched live by millions on television. In the attack, seven people were killed and many were injured. At the first anniversary of this tragic disaster, a monument was unveiled in the presence of the royal family and relatives of the victims.

A second example is a shooting incident which took place in 2011 in a shopping mall in the city of Alphen aan de Rijn. A boy shot several people, killing six persons. He killed himself afterwards. On April 9, 2012, exactly a year later, a memorial plaque with the names of the victims was unveiled. Outside the mall, within a little park, a memorial place including a memorial bench and a tree were erected.

Marking the site of a disaster which took place in a foreign country but with Dutch involvement, has also become a common element in disaster ritual repertoire. For instance, relatives of victims of the Tripoli air crash (2010, 70 Dutch victims) have indicated that they wish to have a monument at the place of the disaster, although this site is on foreign territory. The relatives of the deceased have indicated that they would like to raise two monuments: one in the Netherlands, and one in the vicinity of the place of the crash. As they state: it is important to mark the place where our family ‘lived for the last time’. A monument in the Netherlands would only have a symbolic meaning.⁸⁸⁵

In 2012, a guide with a protocol and checklist was published for local authorities in case a disaster or tragic incident would take place in their community.⁸⁸⁶ Impact, a nationwide knowledge centre on psychological care after disasters, had been assigned by the Dutch Ministry of Justice to draft this report. One chapter of the report has been dedicated to the site of a disaster and to monuments. One of the recommendations is to pay a visit with survivors and relatives of the victims to the site of the disaster. The future destination of the site of the disaster has to be a point of consideration for local authorities.

A next recommendation is to erect a monument in the vicinity of the site of a tragedy. The function of these monuments will be to mark the tragedy in history, but also to facilitate commemorative practices and express emotions. The site of the disaster, including the monument, may accordingly act as a memorial space with its own meaning in coming to terms with the losses of the disaster.

⁸⁸⁵ www.fondsslachtofferhulp.nl/ons-werk/projecten/stichting-vliegcrash-tripoli, accessed September 30, 2013, interview with Siemen Lenos, member of the board of the Stichting Vliegcrash Tripoli.

⁸⁸⁶ HOLSAPPEL: *Herdenken*.

With the publication of these recommendations, the monument at the site of a disaster seems now to be ‘officially’ recommended by government authorities as an important and appropriate element in coping strategies after disasters.

6.7.2 Disasters in the past

A monument is one of the ‘pillars’ of the present disaster ritual repertoire. Is this also the case regarding disasters in the past?

The widespread attention and focus on ‘sanctification’ of the site of a disaster with a monument, also seems to relate to disasters in the past, as has been shown above regarding the period 1945-1962. I traced several postponed monuments and other commemorative practices. Would it be possible to make the same conclusion regarding disasters after Harmelen, and before the emerging of the new disaster ritual repertoire as described by Post *et al.*, that is in the period between 1962 and 1990?

I explored whether I could find postponed monuments regarding disasters in this period and I will present the results of this exploration hereafter chronologically.

In 1967, a tornado with the size of an American tornado, hit the Dutch villages Chaam and Tricht, killing seven people. Thirty-two people were injured and a third of the 1,500 inhabitants of the village of Tricht lost their home. A tornado with the size as big as this one was a unique phenomenon in the Netherlands. Today, this disaster is remembered by a simple commemorative sign in the neighbourhood of the village of Tricht.⁸⁸⁷

In 1970, a patient of a psychiatric hospital in a village in the north of the Netherlands, Wagenborgen, set fire to the curtains. In the following inferno, 16 patients lost their life and 15 patients were injured. After this tragic event, a lot of attention was paid to the security and safety measures.

Unfortunately, three months later, fire was set to another psychiatric hospital in the village of Rolde, also in the northern part of the country. Thirteen patients lost their life in this fire.

Forty-one years after the fire in Wagenborgen a monument was erected at the local cemetery where seven victims have been buried.⁸⁸⁸ No monument could be found to the Rolde fire.

On August 10, 1971, an explosion took place at the chemical factory in Amsterdam, called Marbon. Nine people were killed, among them five firefighters. These firefighters are remembered by means of a memorial plaque with their names in their fire station. This is the only memorial sign that could be found.⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁷ www.knmi.nl/cms/content/103899/zware_windhozen_in_chaam_en_tricht, accessed October 30, 2013.

⁸⁸⁸ www.zero-meridean.nl/c_wagenborgen_241070.html, accessed October 30, 2013.

⁸⁸⁹ www.geschiedenis24.nl/andere-tijden/afleveringen/2000-2001/Marbon.html, accessed October 30, 2013.

In the month of November of that same year, a big fire broke out in hotel Het Silveren Seepaerd in the city of Eindhoven. Eleven people were killed. Although I could find initiatives to commemorate the 40th anniversary of this fire which was called ‘a black page in the history of Eindhoven’, no memorial sign could be found.⁸⁹⁰

In the summer of 1972, on August 25, 13 people lost their life in a huge traffic accident which was caused by heavy fog. It has been, up and till today, the biggest multiple collision in the Netherlands. Forty years after the disaster, articles appeared in the newspapers with testimonies of people who were closely involved in the disaster.⁸⁹¹ But again: no memorial sign was raised.

In the month of November 1975, an explosion took place in the southern part of the country at the premises of a chemical industry called DSM. Fourteen people were killed and 105 were injured. On the 1st of April, 2003, again an explosion took place at the same premises. This time, three people were killed. The head of the human resources department of DSM explains in a newspaper article about the difference in handling the aftermath of both disasters, in particular with respect to the victims and their relatives. In 1975, much information was kept from the victims. Only 28 years later, DSM acknowledged their fault regarding the cause of the disaster and this caused a lot of distress to victims and their relatives.

After the 2003 disaster, much attention was given to the victims and their relatives. A visit was organized to the site of the disaster and people were offered assistance regarding material and immaterial matters. A monument was raised in remembrance of the victims and each year a commemoration ceremony is now organized with the objective, besides commemoration, to speak about each other's emotions and feelings. This DSM case illustrates how commemorative ritual practices have changed in the course of time.⁸⁹²

On May 4, 1976, a train collision took place in the city of Schiedam, 24 people were killed and 15 people were injured. As explained above, in 2004 a general monument, the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen, was raised in Utrecht in commemoration of all victims related to the railways.

On May, 9, 1977, the biggest fire in the Netherlands after the Second World War broke out in Hotel Polen, right in the centre of Amsterdam. Thirty-three people were killed, 32 tourists and one neighbour, and 45 people were injured.⁸⁹³ The building was completely destroyed. A new building was raised at the same spot, and nothing reminds you of the disaster that took place. In 2007, at the 30th

⁸⁹⁰ www.ed.nl/regio/eindhoven/gezocht-getuigen-brand-t-silveren-seepaerd-1.2042349#.UnEb3Cd-89M.email, accessed October 30, 2013.

⁸⁹¹ www.bredavandaag.nl/nieuws/algemeen/2012-08-24/veertig-jaar-na-dodelijkste-ongeval-ooit-op-de-a16-breda, accessed October 30, 2013 and www.omroepbrabant.nl/?news/179510672/Verkeersramp+A16+Prinsenbeek+40+jaar+geleden.aspx.

⁸⁹² www.margosjoerdsma.nl/files/attachments/31-466976.pdf, accessed October 30, 2013.

⁸⁹³ www.geschiedenis24.nl/andere-tijden/aflleveringen/2011-2012/De-hel-in-Hotel-Polen.html, accessed October 30, 2013.

anniversary, eyewitnesses, when asked by the local media, told about their experiences that day and wondered why no official commemoration was organized: it seems that this fire got a 'silent place in the history of Amsterdam.'⁸⁹⁴

In 1975, near the village of Wijster, and again in 1977, near the village of De Punt, trains were hijacked by people with a Moluccan background who wanted to make statements to the Dutch government with regard to their homeland, the Moluccan Islands. These islands are a province of the Indonesian republic, a former Dutch colony. The hijackers were fighting for a free and independent Moluccan state and they made claims to the Dutch government that they should make this possible. This was probably the first time in the world that terrorists attacked trains.

In 1975, two passengers and the train operator were killed by the hijackers. In 1977, two passengers were killed by the hijackers, and six hijackers were killed by a Dutch military force set to liberate the train. The six Moluccans were buried at a cemetery in the city of Assen. A monument was raised at this cemetery by the Moluccan community, in commemoration of their heroes who died because of their ideals. At the 35th anniversary commemoration, protests were heard because of the plans of the Dutch Minister of Defence to decorate the soldiers who had participated in the liberation of the train and who liberated more than 40 train passengers who had been kept hostage.⁸⁹⁵ Remarkably, there is no monument to honour the victims of these train hijackings, unless these victims are also considered to be victims of the railways, and consequently commemorated by the general monument in Utrecht.

On March 27, 1977, two airplanes collided with each other at the airport of Tenerife. In this crash, 543 people lost their lives, only 61 survived. Among the victims were 248 Dutch passengers of the Boeing 747 of KLM Royal Dutch Airlines. Relatives of the Dutch victims established the Foundation for the Surviving Relatives of the Tenerife Disaster, with the intention to help 'the loved ones of the victims of this tragic accident to come to terms with their feelings.'⁸⁹⁶ This foundation organized a commemoration ceremony at the 25th anniversary of the disaster in 2002. In 2007, at the 30th anniversary, a first time ever official international memorial service was held for this largest aviation disaster in history. At this occasion, the International Tenerife Memorial was inaugurated. This monument was designed by the Dutch artist Eddy van der Wint (1942-2006), in the vicinity of the site of the crash which took place at the airport of Tenerife.⁸⁹⁷ The monument is an 18 meter spiral stair case, named Stairway to heaven. The steps appear to move endlessly upward into the sky, however, they are cut off all of sudden. The objective of this monument was phrased by the president of the foundation, Jan Groenewoud, as follows:

⁸⁹⁴ www.rtvnh.nl/nieuws/14743/Brand+Hotel+Polen+30+jaar+geleden, accessed October 30, 2013.

⁸⁹⁵ www.nu.nl/binnenland/2832517/molukkers-herdenken-einde-treinkaping-punt.html, accessed October 30, 2013.

⁸⁹⁶ FOUNDATION FOR THE SURVIVING RELATIVES OF THE TENERIFE DISASTER: *International Tenerife Memorial* 10.

⁸⁹⁷ FOUNDATION FOR THE SURVIVING RELATIVES OF THE TENERIFE DISASTER: *International Tenerife Memorial*.

‘The worst aviation disaster in history will no longer escape anybody’s notice. The monument gives us, the next of kin and survivors, and also all others who were involved, an opportunity to commemorate the disaster and find inner peace. [...] The Foundation for the Surviving Relatives of the Tenerife Disaster has achieved its objective: a monument for all victims, for everyone involved. Only one location is appropriate, and that is Tenerife.’⁸⁹⁸

On October 6, 1980, an airplane crashed near the village of Moerdijk. All people aboard, 17 in total, were killed. The passengers had different nationalities: German, British, and American. The crew had the Dutch nationality. A local firefighter who had witnessed the crash had a heart attack and died. At the 25th anniversary, a commemoration ceremony was organized by a local committee. At this ceremony, the initiative was taken to raise a monument at the site of the crash. Soon after, in 2007, a simple memorial plaque and a flag pole were raised to mark the site of the accident. Pictures were taken and sent to the relatives of the deceased. The monument and the commemoration are relevant to local people who witnessed the crash and the aftermath, and who think it is useful to remember what happened that day.⁸⁹⁹ At the 30th anniversary, again a commemoration ceremony and wreath laying were organized.⁹⁰⁰

On December 16, 1983, a former employee set fire to a club, called Casa Rosso, in the centre of Amsterdam, near the so called red light district. Thirteen people were killed. At the site of the fire a new apartment building was raised and a sober memorial plaque was raised in remembrance of the victims.⁹⁰¹

This exploration of disasters in the period 1962-1990 offers a diverse picture. It is by no means certain that for every disaster in the past a (postponed) monument will be erected. This will depend on local initiatives from people who were involved with the disaster or from initiatives of next of kin to victims. This might explain why there is no monument commemorating the biggest after war fire in the Netherlands (Hotel Polen in Amsterdam), and why there has been erected a monument to commemorate an airplane crash near Moerdijk (1981).

‘Special’ dates, like the 25th or 30th anniversary of a disaster, may come to the attention of the media and the question may be raised about a monument. As a consequence, initiatives may be taken to erect a monument. The International Tenerife Memorial is a monument at the site of the disaster and may serve as recognition of what happened at that place, at that time and as recognition of what it meant to

⁸⁹⁸ FOUNDATION FOR THE SURVIVING RELATIVES OF THE TENERIFE DISASTER: *International Tenerife Memorial* 5.

⁸⁹⁹ www.bndestem.nl/regio/moerdijk/monument-vliegcramp-voltooid-1.860705, accessed October 30, 2013.

⁹⁰⁰ www.omroepbrabant.nl/?news/1626371003/Vliegtuigcramp+Moerdijk+precies+30+jaar+geleden.aspx, accessed October 30, 2013.

⁹⁰¹ www.brandweer.nl/publish/pages/21307/cassarosso1983.pdf, accessed October 30, 2013.

people involved. It is also specifically meant as a tool in coming to terms with the consequences of the loss, even 30 years after the disaster.

6.7.3 To conclude the discussion on monuments to disasters in the past

In addition to the diverse picture sketched above, it may not be concluded that a monument acts as a ‘pillar’ regarding commemoration practices related to disasters in the past, however, in certain cases postponed monuments have been erected and there may still be an incentive to do so in the future.

6.8 In conclusion

At the time of the Harmelen disaster, the appropriate commemoration ritual was usually offered by religious institutions. A simple monument in remembrance of the victims could have been expected but was not erected at the time, mainly for practical reasons.

The objective of the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen, which was erected in 2004, was to create a place where each at his or her own time and manner, would be able to commemorate victims of railway accidents.⁹⁰² Several people involved with the Harmelen disaster consider this general monument a valuable contribution to their commemoration practices of the Harmelen disaster.

Other people concerned kept advocating, even after dedication of the general monument, a particular monument in the vicinity of the place of the Harmelen disaster.

The objective of the Harmelen monument was to create a public designation of the place of the tragedy and offer a space for individual commemoration. This objective is in line with the current and accepted ritual practice after a tragedy, which is to erect a monument at the site of a disaster. This practice has been accepted as a ‘standard’ element or a ‘pillar’ of a disaster ritual.⁹⁰³ The monument is considered to be a place of recognition of what happened at that particular site more than 50 years ago.

Several monuments at the site of the disaster have been erected concerning other disasters in the past, in particular commemorating those disasters which have been ignored or neglected by the general public, or which occurred on foreign territory. In this chapter, I researched the ‘phenomenon’ of postponed monuments to disasters in the past in two different periods: 1945-1962 and 1962-1990. The picture is diverse: issues at stake which may relate to initiate these monuments seem to be recognition of what happened, ‘making good’, and coming to terms with long time hidden and uncared for emotions.

⁹⁰² Ton Honing, personal communication and written information (unpublished) on the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen.

⁹⁰³ POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: Disaster ritual 246.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and epilogue

*I consider the work I do memorials, not monuments; in fact I've often thought of them as anti-monuments. I think I don't make objects; I make places. I think that is very important – the places set a stage for experience and for understanding experience. I don't want to say these places are stages where you act out but rather places where something happens within the viewer.*⁹⁰⁴

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Central research question

This research project has been focused on postponed monuments in different settings and on their context and meaning.

The central research question was as follows:

What is the manifestation, context and meaning of postponed monuments in the contemporary Dutch memorial culture?

With regard to each separate case study, four subsections have been explored:

- erection and objectives, form, symbolism, and location of the monument;
- ritual practices of the monument;
- individual and social context;
- meaning and function of the monument to people closely associated with the monument.

In this chapter, I will formulate an answer to this central question by means of review and interpreting the results of the separate case studies: the Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands and the Jewish Monument Community, monuments to stillborn children, and the Harmelen railway disaster monument. With regard to this research project, they may be called postponed monuments because for various reasons regarding all case study monuments there has been a delay between the events and the erection of the monument.

The four subsections as described above will be used to structure this chapter.

⁹⁰⁴ Lin: *Grounds for remembering* 16.

7.1.2 Subsection 1: erection and objectives, form, symbolism and location of the monument

Erection and objectives

Different objectives have been identified with regard to the separate case study monuments.

The objective of the Ravensbrück monument, dedicated in 1975, was formulated by the Committee of former female inmates of Ravensbrück. This objective is not restricted to female victims of Ravensbrück, but is a general honouring of ‘all women who had the courage to say “no” against fascism.’⁹⁰⁵ The monument was intended to emphasize the important role of women during the war, not only in activities in the resistance but also in the support of their husbands. The monument should also ‘act’ as a warning against the dangers of fascism.

The initiative with regard to the Digital Monument was taken in 2001 by an individual, Professor Emeritus Isaac Lipschits.⁹⁰⁶ The first objective of the Digital Monument and Community is to reconstruct the picture of the Jewish community in the Netherlands on the eve of their destruction by means of ‘returning’ to each individual victim his or her identity.

As of 2001, parents, hospitals, and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, have taken the initiative to erect monuments to stillborn children. Since that time, in many other cities and villages people also initiated similar monuments. A number of more than 160 monuments has been mentioned.⁹⁰⁷ At the time of this thesis, it seems as if the ‘boom’ of monuments may have come to a halt. The objective of these monuments may be formulated as recognition of stillborn children and recognition of the events around stillborn children at the time. With these monuments, commemoration of their stillborn child by parents has been transferred from private circles to the public area.

The Harmelen monument was dedicated in 2012, 50 years after the disaster took place. In 2004, a general monument, the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen, was erected in Utrecht. The objective of this general monument was to create a place where each at his or her own time and manner, would be able to commemorate victims of railway accidents.⁹⁰⁸ Other people concerned kept advocating, even after dedication of the general monument, a particular monument in the vicinity of the place of the Harmelen disaster. The objective of the Harmelen monument was to create, in terms of Foote, a public designation of the place of the tragedy and offer a space for individual commemoration.⁹⁰⁹ As has been illustrated in this project, this objective is in line with the current and accepted ritual practice after a tragedy which is to erect a monument at the site of a disaster.⁹¹⁰ The Harmelen monument is considered to be a place of recognition of what happened at that particular site more than 50 years ago.

⁹⁰⁵ Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück: Circular December 19, 1972.

⁹⁰⁶ www.joodsmonument.nl/page/405673, tab ‘Explanation’, accessed June 25, 2013.

⁹⁰⁷ PEELEN: *Between birth and death*; FARO: ‘Van een glimlach die voorbij kwam en het stille verdriet’.

⁹⁰⁸ Ton Honing, personal communication and written information (unpublished) on the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen.

⁹⁰⁹ FOOTE: *Shadowed ground* 7-35.

⁹¹⁰ POST, GRIMES, NUGTEREN, PETTERSON & ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual* 246.

At several places in the Netherlands, in particular at the site of a disaster, monuments have been erected concerning disasters in the (distant) past, especially commemorating those disasters which have been ignored or neglected by the general public, or which occurred on foreign territory. The objective of these monuments seems to be recognition of what happened, 'making good', and coming to terms with long time hidden and uncared for emotions.

To conclude, regarding the separate case studies, different objectives have been identified.

In 1975, the objective of the Ravensbrück monument was a 'general' honouring of all women who had become victim during the Second World War, either in Ravensbrück or elsewhere.

The other case study monuments have all been dedicated after the year 2000. Their objectives appear to be more detailed than just a general honouring of the victims. The case studies results illustrate that nowadays commemoration may be focused on individuals or on particular groups of victims instead of concerning a more general commemoration relating to victims in broad terms.

For example, the objective of the Digital Monument and Community may be summarized as returning the Dutch victims of the Shoah a name and a face, lest they be forgotten.

The Harmelen monument and monuments to stillborn children, both have the objective with regard to a public recognition of what happened, at a particular site, and at a particular time.

The postponed monuments erected as of the year 2000 and investigated in this project, all involve a focus on the identity of victims and recognition of individual persons and their (life) stories. This emerges to be an objective concerning their erection and dedication.

Form and symbolism

The case study monuments show a variety in form and symbolism. Especially with regard to monuments to stillborn children, a variety in form and symbolism may be observed, mostly related to the loss of the stillborn child. In the case study monuments in Nijmegen and Roermond, the symbolism concerns the (individual) bond between the family and the stillborn child by means of (ceramic) 'forget-me-not's' and so called 'stones of thought'.

The Ravensbrück monument offers a 'difficult' form and symbolism: not many people understand the symbolism and/or the sound and light. Diverse responses may be evoked. However, because of this, a 'communication' between the audience and the monument is the consequence and this communication initiates people to think about the meaning and background of the monument.

The symbolism of the Harmelen monument relates to the victims of the disaster. The human aspect, and not the material and financial damage of the disaster has been emphasized in the design, in particular by means of the female torso, a human figure who lost her arms and legs. The symbolism of the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen refers to life, by means of the steel horizontal plate. This horizontal plate is connected to the 'stilled' circle and continues behind the circle, symbolizing those left behind who have to continue their lives. This symbolism is supported by a poem, engraved at the monument which refers to the passing away of railway victims.

The Digital Monument and Community differs from the other case study monuments regarding form and symbolism. The designers of the site indicated that no symbolism had been intended. Their idea was to create a web page where all Dutch victims of the Shoah could be visualized: a site with 104,000 pixels appeared to be a suitable design in this respect.

Concerning all case study monuments, form and symbolism have been chosen with the objective of transmitting a message to the public. This message relates to the objective of the monument.

The Ravensbrück monument not only involves a commemoration of the victims, but also a message, a warning, against the dangers of fascism. The symbolism of the monuments to stillborn children in this case study, relates to the bond between parents and the stillborn child and their regrets, anger, worries, and sorrow about the loss and the anonymous farewell.

The names of the victims and the history of the Harmelen disaster have been engraved at the monument. Design and symbolism are meant to 'mark' the site of the tragedy for times to come in order never to forget what happened at that misty Monday morning in January, 1962. In contrast, the design of the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen symbolizes the loss of life at the railways in general, making no reference to specific victims or a specific site.

Concerning the Digital Monument and Community, the symbolism of the pixels and the form may not be manifest at first sight. They become patently obvious when browsing through the database of the Digital Monument and Community and one becomes aware of the enormous number of victims of the Shoah represented.

Location: place and space

With regard to the location of the Ravensbrück monument at the Museumplein in the centre of Amsterdam, there appears to be consensus that this is the right place for the monument to communicate its message: among the general public who visit and 'use' the monument as they leisure at the square. It is considered important that people passing by are informed about Ravensbrück and the monument. As of 2013, a memorial sign has been placed at the front of the monument and a mobile app providing information on war monuments is available.

Monuments to stillborn children have most of the time been erected at cemeteries, at the premises of crematoria, or in the vicinity of (mostly) catholic churches. They are erected at the place where parents would have liked to have buried their stillborn child at the time but were not able, for various reasons, to do so.

The Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen was erected at a public and 'neutral' place, not directly related to railway tragedy, in the centre of Utrecht near the main offices of Dutch Railways. As has been illustrated in the case study, there was still a demand to 'highlight' the site of the tragedy and as a consequence, the Harmelen monument was raised in the vicinity of the Harmelen railway disaster, thereby marking the site of the tragedy to the general public.

The Digital Monument and Community have been 'erected' on the worldwide web, therefore at a virtual place.

The results of the case studies illustrate that nowadays the actual ‘place of trauma’ is important regarding ritual commemorative practices and that in the past these places were often ignored or disregarded with regard to the process of coming to terms with the loss. The worldwide web has been introduced as a ‘new’ place with regard to ritual commemoration practices as has been illustrated in the case study on the Digital Monument and Community. This case study shows that also virtual places may be valuable and meaningful places for ritual commemoration practices.

7.1.3 Subsection 2: ritual practices of the monument

With regard to the case study monuments, a variety of commemoration practices has been discerned. The yearly commemoration ceremony at the Ravensbrück monument may be called a ‘traditional’ type of Second World War commemoration ritual: a gathering of people closely associated at the site of a monument with traditional elements like speeches, poems, music, wreath laying, and moments of silence in remembrance of the victims. Former prisoners and their family are usually the most important participants in the ceremony. However, with the years passing by, the number of former prisoners has decreased. Only a few are still able to attend and most probably in future these ceremonies will be performed in a different manner.

The Ravensbrück commemoration ceremony is held around a date related to the Second World War, in particular the date of liberation of the concentration camp. The monument is not very ‘open’ and hardly ‘invites’ people for individual commemoration rituals at other instants during the year.

In contrast, most of the times monuments to stillborn children do invite individual parents to perform their individual commemoration rituals like putting flowers, toys, and cuddles at the site of the monument in remembrance of their stillborn child. The case study monuments offer additional individualized ritual commemoration practices, like putting a memorial stone or a ‘forget-me-not’ at the site of the monument in remembrance of an individual stillborn child. At the site of the monument in Sittard, a yearly ceremony is organized with much input from parents. This meeting is also meant as an assembly of fellow sufferers and as a support to each other.

With regard to the railway monuments, no yearly ceremonies are organized. At the Harmelen monument, the names of all victims are engraved, thus offering a site for individual commemoration to relatives of the victim. This is thought to be more difficult to do at the site of the Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen, because of the relatively general form and symbolism of the monument.

Commemoration practices at the Digital Monument and Community differ from the practices at the other case study monuments, as they are done on an individual basis in all aspects: each may commemorate at his/her own time and own place and in his own manner, for example by means of writing a story about a victim, uploading pictures, or by just browsing through the data or looking up a particular victim.

The case study monuments which were raised after the year 2000, illustrate that they fulfil a contemporary need for individual commemorating practices. This is best shown by the Digital Monument and Community.

The results of the separate case studies show that many years later, many participants still struggle with emotions because of described events in the past.

Frijda has called this occurrence the ‘law of emotional momentum’. According to Frijda, emotional facts and events will retain their power to call up emotions, no matter how much time has passed. Unless these emotions are opposed by frequent exposure, which enables extinction or habituation as far as possible, emotions will reappear.⁹¹¹ This has been illustrated for example in the case study on monuments to stillborn children, where many parents have indicated that they were still very emotional about the loss of their child, and the events around the stillbirth and afterwards. Ritual commemorative practices of a monument may have a function and meaning in this respect. I will discuss these topics more in detail below, in subsection 4.

7.1.4 Subsection 3: individual and social context

With regard to the analysis of the impact of individual and social contexts on the erection of postponed monuments, I will use the concepts of Casey on memory.

As described, Casey’s ‘model’ of individual, social, collective, and public memory, refers to a transfer of private memory to public memory. In the case studies, I have illustrated that monuments may be utilized as ‘vehicles’ of this transfer. With regard to the case study monuments, it may be concluded that for a long time certain memories have been kept within a private circle. Due to changes in individual and social context, individual people or groups of individuals, who share a certain memory, have taken the initiative to make their memory public by means of erecting a monument at a public place.

Although individual memory refers to the person who is engaged in memory, Casey holds the opinion that ‘[...] every single act of remembering that I do comes saturated with social and collective aspects, as well as with cultural and public determinants [...]’.⁹¹² After the Second World War, many former prisoners of Ravensbrück retreated with their memories into private circles and did not attend public commemoration ceremonies. There was neither much public attention with regard to the experiences of Dutch victims of the Shoah or their relatives. And the same may be concluded regarding the experiences of parents of stillborn children or people involved with the Harmelen disaster.

The results of the case studies show that during the postwar reconstruction of Dutch society in the first decades after the Second World War, not much public notice was paid to the relevance and impact of public ritual commemorative practices with regard to coming to terms with emotional events.

Casey contends that the primary *locus* of memory is found, not only in body or mind, but in an inter-subjective connection that is at once social and collective. This may be illustrated in the Ravensbrück

⁹¹¹ FRIJDA: *The laws of emotion* 283-305; FRIJDA: *De wetten der emoties* 27.

⁹¹² CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’ 20.

case study. As of the 1970's, former prisoners of concentration camp Ravensbrück started to attend yearly collective commemoration ceremonies at their own monument. The results of the case study show, that being together with fellow former inmates and thus sharing their individual memories with others, is considered to be an important function and meaning of the monument. Sharing memories with other people with an emotional interest, but also with a wider audience, is also an important aspect in the other case study monuments as the results of the explorations have demonstrated. The results highlight the assertions of Casey on the intersubjective relation between individual and social memory.

Casey discusses the 'power' of monuments and considers them as public 'vehicles' or *commemorabilia*.⁹¹³ The case study monuments proved to be effective vehicles of memory as they act as *commemorabilia* of a past in which both, individual and social context, were a barrier against 'going public' with memory. Nowadays, there is much more room in public arenas for memories as may be shown by the current 'memory boom'. This may also relate to events in a more distant past, like described in the separate case studies. The results of the case studies have illustrated that aspects of 'recognition' and 'reminding' the public of what happened at the time may be involved in this respect.

According to Casey, public memory always involves a combination of time and place. A place is part of public memory in the making (for instance grass roots memorials), but also to the creation of public memory of events from a distant past. A monument at a particular public place seems to enable the transfer of individual memory to public memory.

7.1.5 Subsection 4: meaning and function of the monument to people closely associated with the monument

An important element in the fieldwork relating to the case study monuments, was to explore the function and meaning of the separate monuments to people with a close connection to the monuments.

Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück

At the time of erection of the Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück, the monument was intended to have an important commemorative function. The monument was also intended to 'function' as a medium of warning about the dangers of new forms of fascism. According to the participants in the interviews, this last 'function' of the monument seems to have lost its meaning.

The meaning of the monument has been discussed in the context of the yearly commemoration at the Museumplein. The commemoration ceremony may be described as a 'general' ritual. The focus during the commemoration is still on 'women' of the resistance. Some of the former prisoners have indicated in the interviews that they would like to emphasize their own personal 'accent' on this commemo-

⁹¹³ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 217.

ration: either male, female, or Jewish. As of the year 2000, more attention has been given to these particular accents. However, a desire for more 'space' to emphasize these accents remains and this will most probably continue to be a discussion.

The 'social meaning' of the Ravensbrück monument appears to be commemorating together, at a particular day, at a particular place. This commemorating 'triad' of place, monument and ritual is valued by most participants. Not all elements of this 'triad' are equally appreciated: some value the being together more than the monument or the place. With regard to the second generation involved with Ravensbrück, their opinion seems to be that this meaning remains important in the future.

Digital Monument and Community

The results of the questionnaires show that many of the first generation participants consider the monument as the 'true form' of commemoration of the victims. Participants within this group have assisted right from the start in completing the names and data on the Digital Monument. They seem to hesitate about the value and use of the Community. The monument is considered to 'replace' or to function as a graveyard, a place to visit and to commemorate.

For a long period after the war, participants within this group of first generation participants, have had difficulties in sharing their personal memories with others. The Digital Monument and Community appears to have a function within this group to help them handling their emotions by contributing their personal (life) stories to the Digital Monument and Community. Participants indicated that they experience a 'healing' effect in expressing oneself in a public, in this case a virtual, environment. The results of the research also show that the monument offered participants a highly appreciated opportunity to co-produce memory, with room for individual input.

This positive element of co-production may also be illustrated from the responses in the other groups of participants, in particular with regard to the possibilities of the Community. The Community is highly valued and being able to connect to other users is important. Practices are considered to be a contribution to their family history but also as a more general form of contributing to the history of the Shoah.

The Digital Monument and Community do not seem to replace the 'traditional' commemoration ceremonies. They are considered as an addition to them, a place accessible 24/7 for commemoration all over the world at one's own place and time.

The Digital Monument and Community appear to have a function and meaning as a 'living monument', not closed but open to personal commemorative practices now and in future times.

Stillborn children

The results of the interviews show that most of the parents participating in the research had not come to terms with the loss of their child because of regrets, worries, silence, and disregard of their stillborn children before they enacted a commemoration ritual at a monument.

The following may be concluded regarding the function and meaning of these monuments to parents of stillborn children.

Parents of stillborn children apparently benefit from a public place in order to, finally, come to terms with the loss of their stillborn children. A monument, or a retraced grave, may ‘work’ in this respect. These findings confirm Casey’s opinion that memory is naturally ‘place-oriented’ or at least ‘place-supported’.⁹¹⁴

Apart from this ‘healing’ aspect with regard to the loss of the child, in particular cases, the monument, place, and commemorative ritual practices, also mean a coming to terms with the disrespectful way in which a stillbirth was handled by others at the time, like for instance care givers in the hospital and priests from the Roman Catholic Church.

Many participants in the research still worry about the whereabouts of their children. They seem to keep on looking for a ‘place where the past could revive and survive’, in terms of Casey.⁹¹⁵ Some were able to locate such a place like the place where their stillborn child had been buried at the time, others were not. A monument may offer such a place instead when nothing else is available. This monument may offer a place for ritual commemoration practices and be helpful in the process of handling the loss, no matter how long ago the stillbirth of the child took place.

The Harmelen monument

Several people involved with the Harmelen disaster indicate that the Landelijk Monument Spoorweg-ongevallen offers a valuable contribution to their commemoration practices of the Harmelen disaster. However, other people emotionally involved with the disaster hold a dissenting opinion, and opted for a particular monument in the vicinity of the place of the Harmelen disaster.

The monument is considered to be a place of recognition of what happened at that particular site more than 50 years ago.

With regard to other postponed monuments to disasters of the past, different functions and meanings have been indicated, like recognition of what happened, ‘making good’, and coming to terms with long time hidden and uncared for emotions.

7.2 In conclusion

In this project, manifestation and meaning of postponed monuments in the Netherlands were the focus of attention. An analysis has been made of form, place, ritual practices, and contexts of different postponed monuments. The meaning of these monuments to people directly involved with these monuments has been studied.

It has been suggested in the introduction to this thesis, that developments in memorial culture may have an influence on monument culture. The panorama on Amsterdam monuments may be considered

⁹¹⁴ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 187.

⁹¹⁵ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 187.

to illustrate the current thrive on memory, on monuments, and also on postponed monuments. Three aspects have been mentioned to influence the emergence of postponed monuments. Firstly, the current increase in the recovery of repressed memories of individuals or of groups of individuals whose histories have been ignored or hidden. Secondly, more emphasis upon trauma, grief, reconciliation, and apology. And last, an increasing interest in genealogical research and family narratives.⁹¹⁶

The case study research has illustrated that an increased acceptance of events and places which were 'taboo' in the past, combined with the increased speed in sanctification of places of trauma as mentioned by Foote and Linenthal, may lead to the erection of (postponed) monuments.⁹¹⁷

An increased interest in family histories and family narratives, combined with the issue of returning their identity to previously anonymously honoured and commemorated victims, may lead to the design of new forms of monuments with a focus on individual commemoration and individual ritual commemorative practices.

The desire to commemorate, remember, and memorialize, has become more democratized and there is more room in public space for all of kinds of voices to participate in commemoration of a wide range of events. This process has led in monument culture to a 'bottom up' process of initiation and erection of monuments, with regard to a wider range of events.

Especially with regard to monuments to stillborn children, a process of accretion of monuments after the first monument has been observed, which seems to relate to this democratization process.

A last aspect that needs mentioning is the relation between memory and place, more in particular between memory and places of trauma. Nowadays, people want to keep the memory alive of what happened by transforming the place of trauma into a symbolic site of meaning, with a grassroots memorial or with a more permanent monument. This development also comprises postponed monuments as has been illustrated in the case study monument on, for example, the Harmelen railway disaster.

These conclusions illustrate the interrelation between developments in memorial culture and monument culture, in particular with regard to postponed monuments.

This research shows that monuments are dependent on audiences for whatever memory, emotion, thought, or feeling they produce as a result of the interaction. This reception of the monument by the public, that is what meaning the 'audience' attributes to the monument, is an important element. The results of the case studies show that 'ritual reception' of the monument is in particular essential to enact meaning. A monument produces meaning in the eyes of the public through commemoration, either during regular ceremonies or through other activities, like individual ritual practices at the monument. Frijda describes how ritual commemoration practices may be helpful in coping with

⁹¹⁶ NORA: 'Reasons for the current upsurge in memory'; GARDE-HANSEN: *Media and memory*; ERL: *Memory in culture*; HUYSEN: *Twilight memories*; HUYSEN: *Presents pasts*.

⁹¹⁷ LINENTHAL: *The unfinished bombing*; FOOTE: *Shadowed ground*; FOOTE: 'Shadowed ground, sacred place'.

deeply felt emotions.⁹¹⁸ People, who have been deeply hurt in the past, may benefit from these rituals. Frijda calls the appropriation of the past the essence of commemoration. Participants to the case study research regarding postponed monuments indicated that participation in commemoration rituals, either in a collective ceremony, or individually, for instance at home while being active at the site of the Digital Monument and Community, was helpful in coping with the burden of emotions. Although for some the consequences of the loss will be difficult to cope with, like Frijda says ‘a paper that has been wrinkled will never be smooth again’, commemoration rituals may be helpful.⁹¹⁹ In Frijda’s opinion to suppress emotions will result in a life with a relative emotional ease and safety but at the same time in a life that will not be fulfilled. It will be a life with loneliness and tension with your closest family and friends, like an amputee, on one leg. If, by practicing commemoration rituals at a monument, one faces his deepest emotions it will be a life in which one limps on both diseased legs. Although this might still seem bad, it might still be a better life.

The phenomenon and emergence of postponed monuments illustrates the apparent need for a kind of ‘vehicle’ to open up in public deeply felt, and until that time, hidden or suppressed emotions. Participants in the research apparently ‘opt’ for a confrontation with these ‘deepest’ emotions by participation in commemoration rituals at a postponed monument.

The results of the case studies show that for many people ritual commemoration practices at the site of a monument may contribute to handling these emotions and may result in a life in which ‘the scars will still be there but they will hurt less.’

The case study monuments demonstrate a wide range of ritual commemoration practices, varying from for example laying flowers during a collective commemoration ceremony or reciting a poem, ordering an individual ‘stone of thought’ and putting this stone at the monument during a ritual farewell ceremony of the stillborn child together with one’s next of kin. The results of the case study on the Digital Monument and Community show, that commemorative activities at the website of the Community, like uploading a picture or adding a family history, just as well create meaning.

These dialogic capabilities have been emphasized by Young as he states that monuments ‘by themselves remain inert and amnesiac.’⁹²⁰ Young puts the focus on the audience’s essential role because the meaning of the monument is not depending upon the forms and figures in the monument itself, but on the audience’s response to the monument. The results of this project show that meaning may be produced by the triad of ritual commemoration practices, place, and monument.

This project has illustrated that in particular the dialogic elements of a monument seem to be of paramount importance with regard to postponed monuments. The dialogic ‘capabilities’ incite meaning to people closely and emotionally involved but they also create meaning to a wider audience by means of transmitting a message about a forgotten or disregarded past. This might explain why

⁹¹⁸ FRIJDA: *The laws of emotion* 283-305.

⁹¹⁹ LO GALBO: ‘Ga je mank door het leven of op één been?’

⁹²⁰ YOUNG: *The texture of memory* preface xii.

nowadays for a wide range of events, monuments are raised, and why even long time after the event, people consider monuments to be a useful contribution to their ritual commemorative practices.

7.3 Epilogue

7.3.1 Postponed monuments in memorial culture

Grassroots memorials and postponed monuments

In the opening chapter, a distinction has been made between the contemporary extensive ritual commemorative practice of grassroots memorials and postponed monuments. They both form a part of the ritual repertoire of commemoration practices, but they diverge regarding the aspect of time and form. Grassroots memorials imply an immediate, spontaneous, and most of the time, temporarily commemorative practice. With regard to a postponed monument, there will always be a longer lapse of time before a monument will be erected and the monument will probably be a (permanent) object of public art. However, grassroots memorials and postponed monuments also share certain issues, like the fact that both are examples of ritual commemorative practices at a public space, turning these sites into symbolic sites, heavily laden with emotions on the loss.

I will now consider the issue of postponement in the separate case studies in order to make some final remarks on the emergence of postponed monuments in Dutch memorial culture.

Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück

The Ravensbrück monument was dedicated in 1975, 30 years after the Second World War had ended. For years, the victims had been remembered at other, already existing monuments. Regarding the issue of postponement, the following topics have been determined in this project.

The first three decades after 1945 may be designated as a period during which experiences of survivors, and more in particular experiences of former prisoners belonging to camp committees with a possible communist oriented character, were silenced and not taken notice of.

As of the mid-1970's, an increased focus in the society on the wartime experiences of survivors may be observed. The social acceptance of communist oriented camp committees and an increased concern for wartime survivors and their needs, were the key to an extension of funding of public monuments which made erection of the monument possible.

Digital Monument and Jewish Monument Community

Van Ginkel concludes that in the first decades after the Second World War, monument culture referred to the so called 'national myth of repression and resistance', meaning a nation suffering under the yoke of the German perpetrator and a focus on the heroes who resisted against this oppression. As has already been discussed above, this monument culture left no room for the experiences and traumas of specific groups of victims. In this period, only rarely monuments were raised to honour victims of the

Shoah. If a monument was raised, this was done within the Jewish community and most of the times the monuments were erected at Jewish graveyards that is in semi-public places.⁹²¹

Ramaker and Van Bohemen concluded that ‘shame’ of what happened to the Dutch Jews could be an additional reason why in the early period after the war no monuments for Jewish victims were erected. These feelings might have been a barrier to the erection of monuments and there may have been a certain *verdringing* (suppression) of the events.⁹²² An enlarged concern for victims of the Second World War, as already mentioned above, led to a ‘boom’ in monument culture and also to the erection of many postponed monuments to Dutch Jewish victims of the Shoah.

In both case studies on Second World War monuments, it has been illustrated that silence and repression, a lack of interest in the fate of victims, and shame and suppression of the fate of Dutch Jewish victims of the Shoah, relate to the postponement of these monuments.

The analysis of both case studies leads to a conclusion that social context has an influence on monument culture. Changes in social context led to more interest in the experiences of wartime survivors and more awareness of ‘negative’ or ‘difficult’ wartime histories. This resulted in changes in ritual commemoration practices and erection of postponed monuments.

Stillborn children

Parents of stillborn children have felt for a long time that their stillborn child was silenced and disregarded, because at the time it was thought best never to speak about the loss. The social context was thus one of ignoring and silencing issues with regard to stillborn children and ritual commemorative practices were not customary with regard to stillborn children.

For years, these parents have been burdened by the silence and disregard, by regrets that they did not stood up, and by worries about the whereabouts of their child. When finally the first monument for stillborn children had been dedicated in 2001, many other monuments soon followed. Apparently, they appeared to have a function in to finally coming to terms with the emotional loss regarding the stillbirth of the child. The monuments enable parents to share their individual memories with a wider audience, not only in commemoration practices but also with regard to debate on practices around stillborn children at the time.⁹²³ The ‘disregarded memory’ of their stillborn child has now become public and the practice at the time of ‘disposal’ of stillborn children without any commemoration ritual is now open for a public debate, in particular with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church.

⁹²¹ VAN GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte* 39, 68 and 119.

⁹²² RAMAKER & VAN BOHEMEN: *Sta een ogenblik stil...* 132.

⁹²³ CASEY: ‘Public memory in place and time’.

The Harmelen case study

Taking into consideration the impact of the crash and salvation procedures on local people, some kind of memorial sign could have been expected after the Harmelen railway disaster in 1962. Apparently, in the aftermath of the disaster, voices were heard to mark the site with a monument, but probably because the precise place is a faraway site in the fields, the idea was soon abandoned; it would be impossible and even dangerous for people to visit this place.

The social context at the time was that it was thought best not to talk about the disaster, like has been mentioned in the case study of stillborn children, and go back to business as usual thus leading to an awkward silence around people personally involved in the disaster.

At the time, the site of the disaster, and more in particular commemoration rituals at the site, like for instance the erection of a monument to mark the site of trauma, were not considered to be included in the process of coming to terms with the impressive events. Nowadays, the trauma site and accompanying commemorative rituals have become an important element in coping strategies leading to an increased focus on monuments, also with regard to disasters which took place in the past.

To sum up the discussion on postponed monuments the following may be concluded.

Nowadays, in the Netherlands, ‘difficult’ histories, events, or places from a distant or more recent past, are open for public discussion, for truth and reconciliation: we now live in a social context where negative, shameful, or difficult histories, are open to debate and open to public representation.

There seems to be no limit to whatever formats of media are used in this representation: the spoken and written word, art, film, television, and more recently, social media like internet communities and online fora. Frijhoff describes the presentist nature of our current ‘handling’ of the past. The past is nowadays in the present by means of an expansive memory and memorial culture. These days, a wider range of events, individuals or groups of individuals, are considered to be ‘worthy’ of a public monument which leads to a democratization of the concept ‘monument’ and ‘bottom up’ processes in the initiation and erection of monuments at public places. This may result in the emergence of postponed monuments regarding events, individuals, or groups of individuals, for which commemoration in public was not an accepted commemorative ritual practice at the time.

The emergence of postponed monuments, the object of this project, illustrates that the monument as a medium of memory has strengthened its position in memorial culture.⁹²⁴

7.3.2 The monument as *locus* for commemoration rituals

Collective and individual

In this project, monuments have been studied within the context of ritual commemoration practices. These practices relate to the initiative to erect a monument, the discussion about the design, symbolism, location, and dedication and other commemoration rituals. These practices all relate to the

⁹²⁴ FRIJHOFF: ‘Traumatische herinnering’.

transfer of private memories to public memory. Some of these practices may be considered as rituals, depending on the definition of a ritual and on the character of the practices. In this project, a ritual has been defined as a ‘more or less repeatable sequence of action units which, take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization and their situation in place and time.’⁹²⁵ Grimes notes that ‘ritual is embodied, condensed and prescribed enactment.’⁹²⁶

Traditional commemoration usually takes place in group ceremonies, organized at a specific date, like the anniversary of an event or a person, for instance the yearly ceremony at 9/11 to commemorate the victims of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001, or in the Netherlands the yearly national commemoration of war victims at the 4th of May. Commemoration in the setting of a social group ritual certainly has a firm place in memorial culture. This project has illustrated the emergence of a variety of individual commemoration rituals at the site of a monument, which seem to have an important function and meaning besides collective commemoration rituals. These rituals are sometimes organized at a central level, like the ritual placing and designing of a memorial stone, symbolizing the saying farewell to a stillborn child. These individual rituals may also be thought of by commemorators themselves, like for instance the ritual of placing objects or flowers at the site of a monument.

These individual rituals enact personal meaning to a public monument. In this way, public monuments seem to ‘democratize’ by enabling individuals to ‘embrace’ the monument and add a personal accent.

Monuments are nowadays often initiated by individuals, or by groups of individuals with a personal connection or involvement in the event or person to be commemorated by means of a monument. These bottom-up processes also mean that the public monument, more than ever, has a dynamic interactive character and is considered as a valuable medium in the transfer of memory.

Interaction between the monument and the audience not only takes place by form, symbols, or text, but also by means of collective or individual commemoration rituals which enact meaning. In this project, the monument has been explored as a *locus* for ritual practices, either individual or collective. This perspective has offered new and additional views on the function and meaning of the monument in memorial culture.

The meaning of rituals

Scholars usually distinguish between meaning and function, and they currently debate whether rituals mean anything as well as whether they ‘do’ anything, that is whether they have a function. According to Grimes, rituals both do and mean something: they ‘work’ by making meaning.⁹²⁷ This project has shown that collective and individual commemoration rituals create meaning and may, for example, have a coping function with regard to participants in the ritual practices. The aspect of being together through a ritual gets a new dimension when commemoration takes place on the internet, at a virtual

⁹²⁵ POST, MOLENDIJK & KROESEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern western culture* 18.

⁹²⁶ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 195.

⁹²⁷ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 325-328.

place. The person who commemorates seems to be alone but is 'online' connected with others through online communities and social media.

7.3.3 Place, ritual and memory

In this project, the actual location, the place of a monument, constitutes the connection between a person or an event in the past and 'place' in the present. In addition, ritual practices reinforce this bond between memory and place.

As acknowledged by Paul Post, and in line with Jonathan Smith, 'place matters'. Very often it is a place which directs rituality. In our contemporary society, ritual places have become an important theme.⁹²⁸ In addition, Casey emphasizes the relationship between 'memory' and 'place': 'a memory is often either of a place itself or of an event or person *in* a place [...]'⁹²⁹ Casey declares place to be 'the first of all things', which seems to be in line with the mentioned relevance of place regarding ritual practices. This place does not have to be a 'physical' place, as has been illustrated by the significance and meaning people attach to a virtual commemorative place like the Digital Monument and Community. In this respect, Casey's words seem to hold that a place does not have to be 'something simply physical': a place is more like an 'event'.⁹³⁰ The place of a monument is thus transformed into a 'practiced place' and an active 'space' in which memorial rituals have their own function and meaning.

Nowadays, places of trauma often 'incite' monuments: places where tragic events took place seem to be assigned to commemoration. Shortly after the trauma the place is marked with flowers, memorial notes, or other remembrances to the victims thus creating a grassroots memorial.⁹³¹ This temporarily memorial may be transformed into a permanent monument at a later time. Maybe, because of these developments sites of forgotten traumas and disasters nowadays also may direct rituality and incite the erection of postponed monuments.

This highlighted focus on 'place' as *locus* for the monument could lead to the conclusion that 'place' is a primary element in the ritual commemoration process. Grimes states that places, with the exception of pilgrimage sites, rarely 'drive' ritual, they accompany and facilitate ritual processes.⁹³²

This project has illustrated that although the place of trauma will nowadays most certainly be the place of erection of a monument and thus will lead to ritual action, this may be different regarding postponed monuments. The place of trauma or disaster in times long past, may have an impact on the erection of a monument but erection will also depend on whether there are people taking the initiative and the action to initiate a monument and on their choice of an appropriate place. There will be an

⁹²⁸ POST: *Voorbij het kerkgebouw* 76-83; SMITH: *To take place. Toward theory in ritual*.

⁹²⁹ CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* 183.

⁹³⁰ CASEY: *Getting back into place* 329.

⁹³¹ FOOTE: *Shadowed ground*; FOOTE: 'Shadowed ground, sacred place'; MARGRY & SÁNCHEZ-CARRETERO (eds.): *Grassroots memorials*.

⁹³² GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 242.

interaction between ritual elements like ritual action and place, and place will be important but not decisive with regard to postponed monuments.

7.3.4 Web-based monuments: place, form and symbolism⁹³³

The concept of memorial place gets a new dimension when commemoration is enacted at a virtual monument. In the 'real world' a monument is either erected at a meaningful place, or meaning is attached to the place by means of the erection of a monument. In cyberspace, the place for commemoration is at a virtual place. Rituals are enacted in relation to these web monuments or memorials. Form and symbolism of web-based monuments and memorials might differ from a monument which is designed as an object of art with symbolism and form constructing meaning. This project has shown that a monument erected at a virtual place may as well result into a meaningful and functional place for commemoration practices.

Form and symbolism

Considering how a monument might create meaning to people, Savage made an interesting proposal. He suggested an 'iconoclastic' monument, which is a 'bare' monument with no images, symbolism, or whatsoever. He follows in this respect the ideas of a former United States congressman, back in 1800. This congressman proposed as a monument to George Washington a plain tablet on his tomb, where everyone could write his or her own thoughts in memory of the elder statesman.⁹³⁴ In this way, a monument would become a 'living memorial', not closed but open for new commemoration practices where each can generate his or her own individual meaning.

In line with these considerations of Savage, Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, considered symbolism less important and emphasized that she did not intend her monument to deliver a message. In her opinion, death and loss are personal and private matters. A monument and the memorial place are meant for 'personal reflection and private reckoning'. Places where 'something happens within the viewer'.⁹³⁵ The meaning of the monument should be generated while 'experiencing' the commemorative place by means of (ritual) commemoration practices, according to Lin.

A virtual monument, like the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands and the Jewish Monument Community, could be considered as a monument where meaning is created by activities which may have a ritualized character and with an emphasis not on form or symbolism, but on data, language, and pictures.

This project has shown that virtual monuments nowadays have their own function, position, and meaning in memorial culture. They do not seem to replace traditional monuments but are considered as a valuable contribution to ritual commemoration practices.

⁹³³ See also for an extensive discussion on the Digital Monument and Community: C. POST: *Memorial culture in a virtual world*.

⁹³⁴ LIN: 'Grounds for remembering' 11-12; SAVAGE: *Monument wars* 42-43.

⁹³⁵ LIN: 'Grounds for remembering' 13.

7.3.5 Study of the monument in the interdisciplinary field of ritual studies and memory studies

Casey concludes that memory is omnipresent:

‘In the case of memory, we are always already in the thick of things... Not only because remembering is at all times presupposed, but also because it is always at work: it is continually going on, often on several levels and in several ways at once.’⁹³⁶

The issue of ‘memory’ and how memory is mediated is studied within the field of memory studies, which involves disciplines like sociology, historiography, psychology, anthropology, communication, and media studies.⁹³⁷

For a long time, the monument has been studied within the field of memory studies and much attention has been paid to issues like transmission and representation of the memory of a certain event or person, subjective to social and political circumstances.

This project has been an exploratory study of postponed monuments, primarily in the field of ritual studies. The monument has been considered within the triad of place as initiation to rituals, commemoration ritual practices, and the monument itself. The focus was on the meaning of this triad to people who commemorate at the monument and the results of this study show that meaning is produced by interaction of place, ritual, and monument.

Within the field of ritual studies, this interaction has often been studied regarding grassroots memorials with emerging ritual practices like laying flowers or objects, and lighting candles at the place of trauma. Postponed monuments, so far, have been studied within the field of history, art history, or memory studies, but they have not been studied with a focus on the triad place - ritual - monument within the field of ritual studies.

This project shows that it is worthwhile to study monuments in the interdisciplinary field of memory studies and ritual studies, in order to interpret the meaning of monuments in a wider perspective. Monuments offer a stage where the viewer will engage with his memories, also through ritualized actions. Monuments ‘work’ and create meaning by means of form, symbolism, and text, but in the same time also by ritual practices. These commemoration rituals should be integrated in contemporary studies on the position of the monument in current memorial culture.

⁹³⁶ CASEY: *Remembering*. A phenomenological study xix.

⁹³⁷ OLICK, VINITZKY-SEROUSI & LEVY: ‘Introduction’ 37.

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Samenvatting

'Uitgestelde' monumenten in Nederland

Introductie

Tijdens de marathon van Boston, op 15 april 2013, explodeerden twee bommen in het publiek dat langs het parcours stond. Drie mensen kwamen om het leven en honderden raakten gewond. Daags na de aanslag veranderde de plek des onheils in een plaats van herinnering en herdenking. Mensen legden bloemen, knuffels en brieven neer en velen lieten hun hardloopschoenen daar achter. De plaats werd het centrale punt van een stille tocht én van andere vormen van publiek rouw- en herdenkingsritueel. Dit is tegenwoordig een veel voorkomend fenomeen: daags na een ramp of een andere tragische gebeurtenis verandert de plek des onheils in een plaats van herdenking van de slachtoffers. Deze transformatie tot een 'spontaan monument' met vaak een tijdelijk karakter is een vast onderdeel geworden van het gebruikelijke rituele repertoire in de openbare ruimte na rampen en andere tragische gebeurtenissen met een grote impact.

Ongeveer zes maanden vóór de bomaanslag in Boston vond er een ander herdenkingsritueel plaats bij de onthulling van een nieuw opgericht monument in Duitsland. Op 24 oktober 2012 werd in Berlijn een monument onthuld ter nagedachtenis aan de 500.000 Sinti- en Romaslachtoffers van het Naziregime tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Zevenenzestig jaar na het einde van deze oorlog benadrukte Bondskanselier Merkel in haar speech het belang van dit monument voor nu en in de toekomst: het monument betekent een blijvende herinnering aan de genocide die heeft plaats gevonden binnen deze bevolkingsgroep en waar – volgens Merkel – zolang te weinig aandacht voor is geweest.

De oprichting van het Sinti en Roma monument in Berlijn, lange tijd na de Tweede Wereldoorlog, dient als een voorbeeld van een categorie monumenten die als het ware 'uitgesteld' zijn: ze worden opgericht lange tijd na het gebeuren waaraan ze herinneren. Het Sinti- en Romamonument in Berlijn vormt geen uitzondering: er zijn vele andere actuele voorbeelden te noemen van monumenten die worden opgericht ter herdenking van gebeurtenissen of personen uit het verleden. Het betreft vaak gebeurtenissen of personen die tot nu toe ontkend, discutabel of vergeten waren of minder in de belangstelling stonden. De essentie van deze monumenten ligt in de behoefte die wordt gevoeld om een publieke plaats van permanente herdenking te creëren. Deze monumenten zijn vaak het 'eindstation' van een langdurig proces.

In het veld van de rituele studies wordt recent veel aandacht besteed aan de bestudering van de eerder genoemde spontane monumenten, dit terwijl er veel minder belangstelling is voor de bestudering van 'uitgestelde' monumenten als een aparte categorie.

De centrale onderzoeksvraag

Deze studie betreft een exploratie van het fenomeen ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten in Nederland. De centrale onderzoeksvraag luidt als volgt:

Wat is de verschijningsvorm, context en betekenis van ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten in de hedendaagse Nederlandse herinneringscultuur?

Om een breed zicht te krijgen op ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten is naast een oriënterende en verkennende studie gekozen voor een casestudy aanpak en zijn vier ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten geselecteerd.

Theoretisch kader

In eerste instantie is onderzocht hoe de begrippen ‘monument’, ‘ritueel’, ‘plaats’ en ‘ruimte’ theoretisch kunnen worden ingevuld en hoe ze zich in het kader van betekenisverlening rond een monument tot elkaar verhouden.

De Amerikaanse wetenschapper James Young benadrukt in zijn baanbrekende studie over Shoah monumenten de, wat hij noemt, ‘dialogic capabilities of monuments and memorials’: ‘Memorials by themselves remain inert, and amnesiac.’ Young legt de nadruk op de essentiële rol die het publiek of de beschouwer van het monument speelt bij het herdenken. De betekenis van het monument wordt niet alleen bepaald door de uiterlijke kenmerken, vormgeving en ontwerp van het monument maar komt tot stand in de interactie tussen het monument en het publiek. Dit publiek kan uit verschillende groepen beschouwers bestaan variërend van ‘persoonlijk betrokken en op de hoogte’ tot ‘niet persoonlijk betrokken en niet op de hoogte’ ten aanzien van de achtergrond en waar het monument aan herinnert.

In dit opzicht stelt de Amerikaanse filosoof Edward Casey de vraag wat een ‘effectief’ monument zou kunnen zijn. Hij beschouwt Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial een effectief monument omdat het een openbare ruimte, ‘plaats’, biedt ‘in which the spontaneous expression of feeling and the exchange of thought are enabled and enhanced.’ Casey brengt herdenkingshandelingen en -rituelen bij een monument in verband met emoties en gevoelens die daarbij oproepen kunnen komen. ‘Effective’ monumenten staan in contrast met ‘unfriendly’ en volgens Casey dus ‘ineffective’ monumenten, zoals bijvoorbeeld Arc de Triomphe in Parijs, die zich op een niet-uitnodigende plaats bevindt, temidden van het drukke verkeer waar het moeilijk zal zijn om een vertrouwelijke relatie te creëren tussen het monument en het publiek.

De Amerikaan Kirk Savage, expert in kunst en architectuur stelt het concept ‘monument’ ter discussie in zijn baanbrekende werk *Monument wars. Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the transformation of the memorial landscape*. In de introductie van dit boek uit hij zijn angst ten aanzien van wat hij noemt de ‘inherently conservative art form’ van monumenten:

‘They obey the logic of the last word, the logic of closure. Inscriptions are fixed forever; statues do not move and change. Traditionally, this means that monuments strip the hero or event of historical complexities and condense the subject’s significance to a few patriotic lessons frozen for all time.’

Volgens Savage, en hij sluit hiermee aan bij de ideeën van Casey, zouden monumenten uit de 21^{ste} eeuw geen ‘gesloten’ vorm moeten hebben maar juist ‘spaces of experience’ moeten zijn waar ‘journeys of emotional discovery’ kunnen plaatsvinden.

De Amerikaan Timothy Recuber concludeert in zijn studie naar web memorials na de aanslagen in 2001 in New York op het World Trade Center dat hedendaagse monumenten een therapeutische component zouden moeten hebben. Hij beschrijft eveneens het voorbeeld van het Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC als het ideale voorbeeld van het therapeutische monument: ‘This monument aimed to help individuals and the nation as a whole heal the psychic wounds inflicted by the Vietnam conflict, rather than simply honoring soldiers or making a political statement.’

Als laatste in deze korte duiding van de kernbegrippen die in dit onderzoek aan de orde komen kan de Amerikaan John Gillis genoemd worden. Volgens Gillis representeert het Vietnam Veterans Memorial met zijn namenwand een

‘turning point in the history of public memory, a decisive departure from the anonymity of a traditional monument, like for instance the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington DC, and a growing acknowledgement that everyone now deserves equal recognition at all times in wholly accessible places.’

Hij beschouwt het Vietnam Veterans Memorial als een ‘event’ waar elke bezoeker herdenkingsrituelen op een individuele manier kan uitvoeren. Deze wijze van herdenken verschilt volgens Gillis veel van een bezoek aan bijvoorbeeld de Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: ‘At Arlington it is the honor guard that performs the rites of remembering, limiting the spectators largely to the role of audience. Most visitors confine their activity to picture taking, thus further distancing themselves from the event itself.’

Deze duiding van de begrippen ‘monument’, ‘ritueel’, ‘plaats’ en ‘ruimte’ is vervolgens leidend geweest in het veldwerk dat is verricht en aanzien van de volgende vier geselecteerde ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten.

Het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück (1975)

Ravensbrück was gedurende de Tweede Wereldoorlog een concentratiekamp voor vrouwen, gelegen in het noorden van Duitsland, ongeveer negentig kilometer ten noorden van Berlijn, in de nabijheid van Fürstenberg. Het concentratiekamp was in eerste instantie bedoeld om ten tijde van het Naziregime vrouwelijke gevangenen onder te brengen, maar ook werden er gedurende langere tijd mannelijke gevangenen geïnterneerd. De exacte cijfers zijn niet bekend maar waarschijnlijk waren, van 1939 tot aan de bevrijding van het kamp in april 1945 door het Russische leger, in totaal 123.000 vrouwen en 20.000 mannen door de Duitsers geïnterneerd in Ravensbrück. Hiervan waren ongeveer 850 vrouwen en 300 mannen afkomstig uit Nederland.

Het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück werd in 1975 op het Museumplein in Amsterdam onthuld. Elk jaar, in de maand april en rond de datum van de bevrijding van het kamp op 30 april 1945, wordt bij dit monument een herdenkingsceremonie gehouden.

Dit monument is om diverse redenen geselecteerd als casestudy monument. In de eerste plaats omdat het monument dertig jaar na de bevrijding van het kamp werd opgericht. Wat is de achtergrond van dit uitstel? In de tweede plaats is het een interessant monument om te onderzoeken vanwege het ‘installatie-achtige’ design van het monument: een abstract ontwerp, in combinatie met geluid- en lichtelementen was in die tijd een opmerkelijk keuze van het Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück en opvallend binnen de categorie oorlogsmonumenten. De interactie tussen monument en publiek is, tot aan de dag van vandaag, een interessant aspect om te onderzoeken vanwege dit ontwerp.

Het Digitaal Monument voor de Joodse gemeenschap in Nederland en de Community Joods Monument (2005 en 2010)

In april 2005 ging het Digitaal Monument voor de Joodse Gemeenschap in Nederland online (hierna: Digitaal Monument). Dit monument op het internet herinnert alle mannen, vrouwen en kinderen die als Joden werden vervolgd tijdens de bezetting van Nederland door de Nazi's en die de Shoah niet hebben overleefd. Professor Emeritus Isaac Lipschits (1930-2008) nam het initiatief om een monument op te richten dat inzicht zou bieden in het leven van de meer dan 100.000 Hollandse Joden van wie het leven eindigde in de Shoah. De homepage is het eigenlijke monument en bestaat uit een screen met duizenden kleine, gekleurde blokjes. Elke persoon, herdacht in het monument, heeft een eigen blokje met daaraan gekoppeld een persoonlijke webpagina.

Het monument heeft twee hoofddoelstellingen. De eerste doelstelling betreft het bewaren van de herinnering aan de Nederlandse Joodse slachtoffers van de Shoah. De tweede doelstelling is overlevenden en andere geïnteresseerde bezoekers van deze website te informeren over de slachtoffers van de Shoah.

In 2010 ging de Community Joods Monument online (hierna: Community). Dit is een interactieve website, complementair aan het Digitaal Monument, waar deelnemers aan de Community foto's, informatie en verhalen over slachtoffers die worden herdacht op het monument kunnen uploaden.

Met dit monument en de bijbehorende Community wordt een nieuwe benadering van herdenking geïntroduceerd waarbij nieuwe concepten in ontwerp, (plaats van) herdenking en interactie met het publiek worden toegepast. Naast het feit dat dit een uitgesteld monument is, is de cyber-dimensie mede aanleiding geweest om het Digitaal Monument en Community als casestudy te betrekken in deze studie.

Behalve deze twee ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten gerelateerd aan de Tweede Wereldoorlog, zijn er in deze studie nog twee andere typen ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten onderzocht. De derde casestudy betreft een type monument dat behoort tot de categorie monumenten welke worden opgericht als het ware ter ‘emancipatie’ van bepaalde groepen, dat wil zeggen dat deze monumenten (mede) dienen om aandacht te vragen voor deze groepen in de openbare ruimte.

Monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen

Tot de jaren negentig van de twintigste eeuw was het algemeen gebruik in Nederland om kinderen die rond de geboorte kwamen te overlijden van de ouders te scheiden. Professionele zorgverleners waren van mening dat, indien de ouders zich niet aan het levenloos geboren kind zouden hechten en er geen herinnering aan zouden hebben, het verlies beter zou kunnen worden verwerkt. De gebruikelijke afscheidsrituelen werden compleet genegeerd en ouders werden niet in de gelegenheid gesteld hun kind zelf te laten begraven of cremen. Anderen, ziekenhuispersoneel, of vertegenwoordigers van de kerk, namen de regie in handen en meestal werden deze kinderen op een anonieme manier begraven of gecremeerd en werden ouders hier niet over geïnformeerd.

Vanaf het jaar 2000 verschenen in Nederland in de publieke ruimte monumenten ter nagedachtenis aan deze kinderen. Waarschijnlijk zijn er op dit moment rond de 160 monumenten. De meeste zijn opgericht op begraafplaatsen, in de nabijheid van crematoria, of bij kerken.

Mede ten gevolge van de grote aandacht van de media werd een publieke discussie gestart over de gang van zaken destijds en begonnen vele ouders een zoektocht naar de verblijfplaats van de overblijfselen van hun levenloos geboren kinderen. Als deze plaats wordt teruggevonden voelen veel ouders de behoefte om deze plaats te markeren met herdenkingsrituelen en op vele plaatsen is ook het initiatief genomen om een monument op te richten. De betekenis van deze plaats van herdenking voor ouders is een plek van rouw en liefde voor het levenloos geboren kind. Maar het is ook een boodschap van openbaar protest tegen dominante partijen die destijds ouders beletten de geëigende afscheidsrituelen in acht te nemen voor hun levenloos geboren kind.

Dit type monument is relevant vanwege hun aantal en hun 'populariteit'. Zij vormen één van de nieuwe categorieën binnen de Nederlandse monumentencultuur en exploratie van een aantal van deze monumenten in het bijzonder levert een waardevolle bijdrage aan beantwoording van de leidende onderzoeksvragen binnen deze studie.

De laatste casestudy heeft betrekking op een uitgesteld rampenmonument. Rampenmonumenten zijn meer prominent geworden sinds de jaren negentig van de twintigste eeuw en er worden tegenwoordig ook 'uitgestelde' rampenmonumenten opgericht, veelal op initiatief van slachtoffers of familieleden van slachtoffers of door lokale betrokkenen.

Het monument voor de treinramp bij Harmelen (2012)

Op 8 januari 2012 werd een monument in de nabijheid van Harmelen onthuld, ter nagedachtenis aan de slachtoffers van de grootste treinramp uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis die vijftig jaar eerder daar plaatsvond. Het monument heeft geen naam gekregen. Het initiatief werd genomen door mensen uit de lokale gemeenschap. Het monument bestaat uit een vrouwelijke bronzen torso, dat wil zeggen een vrouwelijk lichaam zonder armen of benen: 'de gebroken mens' zoals de kunstenaar aangeeft. Deze figuur is op een console geplaatst en symboliseert de drieënnegentig dodelijke slachtoffers van de frontale botsing

tussen twee treinen die daar op 8 januari 1962 plaatsvond. De namen van deze slachtoffers staan gegraveerd op twee platen aan weerszijden van de console.

Het initiatief tot en de organisatie van monument en onthullingsceremonie werden genomen door de burgemeester en de voorzitter van de dorpsraad van Harmelen. Aanleiding was de vijftigjarige herdenking van de ramp in 2012 en de gevoelde behoefte om op dat moment een eerbetoon te brengen aan alle slachtoffers, hulpverleners en overige lokale betrokkenen.

Voornaamste reden om dit monument als casestudy te selecteren is de lange periode tussen de ramp zelf en de oprichting van het monument, en de nadrukkelijke wens van slachtoffers en nabestaanden van de slachtoffers om de plek des onheils te markeren met een monument.

Onderzoeksmethode

Binnen elke casestudy zijn vier aspecten van de monumenten onderzocht:

- oprichting en doelstellingen, vorm, symboliek en de locatie van het monument;
- rituele handelingen rond het monument;
- individuele en maatschappelijke context;
- betekenis en functie van het monument voor mensen die zich nauw verbonden voelen met het monument.

Deze aspecten zijn aan de orde gekomen binnen het kader van een exploratieve, kwalitatieve studie, uitgevoerd binnen het veld van de rituele studies met raakvlakken met het onderzoeksveld van de zogenaamde *cultural memory studies*. Via een analyse van de verzamelde empirische data is het handelen en de context van mensen die direct betrokken zijn bij een uitgesteld monument onderzocht. Hierbij ligt de focus op het handelen, de emoties die naar boven komen en de betekenis die wordt toegekend aan deelname aan een herdenkingsceremonie of andere herdenkingsactiviteiten bij een uitgesteld monument.

Eerste aspect: oprichting en doelstellingen, vorm, symboliek en de locatie van het monument

Oprichting en doelstellingen

Er zijn verschillende doelstellingen geïdentificeerd met betrekking tot de verschillende casestudy monumenten.

De doelstelling van het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück werd geformuleerd door het Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück dat toentertijd bestond uit voormalige kampgevangenen van concentratiekamp Ravensbrück. De doelstelling van het monument werd niet beperkt tot de herinnering en herdenking van uitsluitend kampgevangenen van Ravensbrück maar betekende een algemeen eerbetoon aan alle vrouwen die destijds de moed hadden om 'nee' te zeggen tegen de gevaren van het fascisme. Het monument was bedoeld om de belangrijke rol van vrouwen tijdens de oorlog te benadrukken, niet

alleen in verzetsactiviteiten, maar ook in de ondersteuning van hun echtgenoten. Het monument zou ook in de toekomst een rol moeten vervullen als een waarschuwing tegen de gevaren van het fascisme.

De primaire doelstelling van het Digitaal Monument en de Community is een beeld te schetsen van de Joodse gemeenschap in Nederland en van de individuele leden van deze gemeenschap aan de vooravond van de deportaties. Op die manier krijgt elk individueel slachtoffer als het ware zijn of haar identiteit terug. Zo wordt de herinnering aan alle Joden in Nederland die tijdens de Shoah zijn omgekomen levend gehouden en kunnen nabestaanden en overige belangstellenden slachtoffers van de Shoah herdenken.

De doelstelling van monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen kan geformuleerd worden als een herdenking, maar vooral ook als een erkenning van levenloos geboren kinderen en als een erkenning van de gebeurtenissen rond levenloos geboren kinderen toentertijd.

Zoals gezegd werd het monument ter nagedachtenis aan de slachtoffers van de treinramp bij Harmelen in 1962 onthuld exact vijftig jaar ná de treinramp. In 2004 werd in Utrecht een algemeen monument, het Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen, opgericht en onthuld. De doelstelling van dit landelijke monument was om een plaats te creëren waar een ieder op zijn of haar eigen tijd en wijze slachtoffers van spoorwegongevallen zou kunnen herdenken. Bij dit landelijke monument zouden dus ook de slachtoffers van de ramp bij Harmelen herdacht kunnen worden. Na de onthulling van dit landelijke monument werd er toch door betrokkenen gepleit voor de oprichting van een specifiek monument in de nabijheid van Harmelen.

De doelstelling van het monument bij Harmelen is het creëren van een markering in de openbare ruimte van de plaats van de ramp en de mogelijkheid te scheppen voor individuele herdenking op die plaats in het bijzonder.

Bij de casestudy monumenten zien we een ontwikkeling in de doelstellingen van monumenten: van een herdenking van de slachtoffers in algemene zin (Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück) naar een meer op het individuele slachtoffer gerichte herdenking waarbij de identiteit van elk slachtoffer benoemd wordt door bijvoorbeeld zijn of haar naam op het monument te graveren (Harmelen) of zijn levensomstandigheden te beschrijven (Digitaal Monument en Community).

Uit deze studie blijkt dat herdenking op de plek des onheils in overeenstemming is met het hedendaagse rituele repertoire na rampen, dat onder andere bestaat uit de oprichting van een monument op de plaats van de ramp. Het monument bij Harmelen wordt beschouwd als een plaats van erkenning van wat er toentertijd, inmiddels meer dan vijftig jaar geleden, op die plek zich heeft afgespeeld. Bij de monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen speelt deze publieke erkenning van het gebeuren ook een rol.

Het Harmelen monument is in dit opzicht niet uniek. Zo zijn er op verscheidene andere plaatsen in Nederland eveneens monumenten opgericht ter herdenking van rampen uit het verleden. In het bijzonder gaat het dan om rampen die tot dan toe werden ontkend of genegeerd door het algemeen publiek, of welke zich hebben afgespeeld op buitenlands grondgebied. De doelstelling van deze monumenten kan geformuleerd worden als: erkenning van wat er zich destijds heeft afgespeeld, ‘goed maken’ en het verwerken van lang verborgen gehouden emoties waar destijds geen aandacht aan werd gegeven.

Vorm en symboliek

De casestudy monumenten vertonen een variëteit in vorm en symboliek. In het bijzonder bij monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen wordt een grote variëteit in vorm en symboliek gesignaleerd welke voornamelijk gerelateerd is aan het verlies van het levenloos geboren kind. De monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen in Nijmegen en Roermond, die in de casestudy's nader worden onderzocht, vertonen een symboliek die gerelateerd is aan de (individuele) band tussen de familie en het levenloos geboren kind door middel van een 'vergeet-me-nietje' van keramiek (Nijmegen) en een gedachtensteen (Roermond).

Het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück heeft een niet direct toegankelijke vorm en symboliek en niet veel mensen begrijpen onmiddellijk de symboliek en/of het geluid en het licht. Er is dan ook een diversiteit aan reacties op vorm en symboliek van het monument. Vorm en symboliek hebben wel tot gevolg dat er een bepaalde communicatie tot stand wordt gebracht tussen het publiek en het monument welke mensen aanzet om na te denken over de betekenis en achtergrond van dit monument.

De symboliek van het Harmelen monument heeft betrekking op de slachtoffers van de treinramp. Het menselijke aspect staat centraal in het ontwerp, in het bijzonder door de keuze van een vrouwelijke torso als vorm voor het monument. De symboliek van het Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen in Utrecht verwijst naar het leven door middel van de stalen horizontale plaat welke verbonden is met een 'verstilde' cirkel en welke doorgaat achter de cirkel, waarmee degenen die zijn achtergebleven en die moeten doorgaan met hun leven worden gesymboliseerd. Deze symboliek wordt ondersteund door een gedicht dat op het monument is gegraveerd en waarin in het algemeen wordt gerefereerd aan de overledenen ten gevolge van ongevallen rond het spoor.

Het Digitaal Monument en Community verschillen qua vorm en symboliek van de andere casestudy monumenten. De ontwerpers van de website hebben aangegeven dat zij niet de intentie hadden met een bepaalde symboliek te werken. Hun idee was een webpagina te ontwerpen waarop alle Nederlandse slachtoffers van de Shoah gevisualiseerd zouden kunnen worden: een site met 104.000 pixels bleek in dit verband een geschikt 'design'.

Bij alle onderzochte monumenten blijken vorm en/of symboliek gekozen te zijn met het doel een bepaalde boodschap over te brengen aan het publiek. Deze boodschap is gerelateerd aan het doel van het monument.

Het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück legt niet alleen een relatie met het herdenken van de slachtoffers, maar omvat ook een waarschuwing voor de dreigingen van het fascisme. De symboliek van de monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen hebben betrekking op de band tussen ouders en hun levenloos geboren kind, op spijt, woede, zorgen en verdriet over het verlies en het anonieme afscheid van hun kind.

De namen van de slachtoffers van de treinramp bij Harmelen en de geschiedenis van de ramp staan op het monument gegraveerd. Het ontwerp en de symboliek zijn bedoeld om de plaats van der ramp voor altijd te markeren opdat niemand zal vergeten wat er ooit op die mistige maandagmorgen in januari 1962

op die plek is gebeurd. In contrast hiermee symboliseert het ontwerp van het Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen het verlies van het leven op of rond het spoor meer in algemene zin en wordt er niet gerefereerd aan specifieke slachtoffers of een specifieke plaats.

Voor wat betreft het Digitaal Monument en de Community, een virtueel monument, springt de symboliek van de pixels en het ontwerp van de website misschien niet meteen in het oog. De symboliek wordt pas duidelijk wanneer de bezoeker van de website zich realiseert dat de pixels het enorme aantal Nederlands slachtoffers van de Shoah representeren.

Locatie: 'plaats' en 'ruimte'

Onder de direct betrokkenen bij het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück blijkt consensus te zijn over de locatie van het monument. Het Museumplein, in het centrum van Amsterdam, is de juiste plaats om de bedoelde 'boodschap' van het monument, zoals hierboven omschreven, te communiceren: te midden van de bevolking, op een druk bezochte plaats, waar mensen het monument kunnen bezoeken en 'gebruiken', terwijl ze zich ontspannen op het plein. Deze activiteiten blijken lang niet altijd het karakter van herdenken of herinneren te hebben, maar ook dat is in overeenstemming met de bedoelingen van het Comité Vrouwen van Ravensbrück en wordt niet als storend ervaren door direct betrokkenen bij het monument. Wél vindt men het van belang dat voorbijgangers worden geïnformeerd over concentratiekamp Ravensbrück en de betekenis van het monument. Sinds 2013 lijkt er aan die wens tegemoet gekomen te zijn en is er een plaquette aan de voorkant van het monument aangebracht met informatie. Tevens is er nu een mobiele applicatie beschikbaar waardoor informatie over oorlogsmonumenten, en dus ook over dit monument, op de locatie toegankelijk is geworden.

Monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen zijn vooral opgericht op begraafplaatsen, op de terreinen van crematoria of in de nabijheid van (meestal) Rooms-Katholieke kerken. Ze zijn te vinden op de plaatsen waar ouders hun levenloos geboren kind hadden willen begraven, maar waartoe ze destijds, om verschillende redenen niet in staat waren.

Het Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen is opgericht op een publieke en 'neutrale' plaats welke niet direct gerelateerd is aan een specifieke tragedie met betrekking tot de spoorwegen. Het monument bevindt zich in het centrum van Utrecht, in de nabijheid van het hoofdkantoor van de Nederlandse Spoorwegen. Onderzoek binnen de casestudy's laat zien dat er na de oprichting van dit algemene monument nog steeds behoefte was om de plaats waar de Harmelen ramp destijds plaats vond, te markeren met een monument. Het monument voor de treinramp bij Harmelen is vervolgens dicht bij de plaats waar deze tragedie plaats vond, maar wel aan de openbare weg geplaatst, zodat voortaan voorbijgangers herinnerd zullen worden aan wat zich daar destijds heeft afgespeeld.

Het Digitaal Monument en Community vormen tezamen een virtueel monument, 'opgericht' op het world-wide-web, en dus op een virtuele en neutrale plaats.

Dit onderzoek illustreert dat tegenwoordig de plaats van de ramp of tragedie, van belang is met betrekking tot rituele handelingen, terwijl in het verleden deze plaatsen juist, in relatie met het verwerkingsproces van het verlies, genegeerd en ontweken werden.

Het world-wide-web is een nieuw type plaats waar ritueel handelen zich kan afspelen. De casestudy rond het Digitaal Monument en Community laat zien dat virtuele plaatsen eveneens plaatsen kunnen zijn waar herdenkingsrituelen met een bepaald doel en betekenis worden uitgevoerd.

Tweede aspect: rituele handelingen rond het monument

De jaarlijkse herdenking op het Museumplein bij het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück behoort tot het zogenaamde ‘klassieke’ type van een herdenkingsritueel van de gebeurtenissen uit de Tweede Wereldoorlog: een bijeenkomst van mensen met een nauwe band met concentratiekamp Ravensbrück, waarbij tijdens de ceremonie gebruik wordt gemaakt van traditionele elementen ter nagedachtenis van de slachtoffers zoals toespraken, gedichten, muziek, het leggen van bloemen en kransen en inachtneming van momenten van stilte. Voormalige kampgevangenen en hun familie en naasten zijn de meest belangrijke deelnemers aan deze ceremonie. Met het verloop van de jaren neemt het aantal voormalige gevangenen dat in staat is deel te nemen aan deze ceremonie terug hetgeen betekent dat in de toekomst waarschijnlijk een aantal elementen van de ceremonie zal veranderen.

Deze jaarlijkse herdenking vindt plaats in de maand april, rond de dag waarop het kamp destijds werd bevrijd. Wellicht vanwege de vorm en misschien ook vanwege het publieke karakter van de plaats van het monument nodigt het monument op andere dagen van het jaar niet erg uit tot individueel herdenkingsritueel en wordt hier door voormalige gevangenen eigenlijk geen gebruik van gemaakt.

Monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen daarentegen nodigen meestal wél uit tot individueel ritueel handelen. Deze studie illustreert dat ouders zich vaak geroepen voelen individuele herdenkingsrituelen uit te voeren, zoals bijvoorbeeld het leggen van bloemen, knuffels of speelgoed bij het monument ter nagedachtenis aan hun levenloos geboren kind. De in de casestudy onderzochte monumenten in Nijmegen (Monument voor het nooit verloren kind) en in Roermond (Monument voor het doodgeboren kind) bieden ouders daarnaast de mogelijkheid tot individuele herdenkingsrituelen zoals het leggen van een gedachtensteen of een ‘vergeet-me-nietje’ van keramiek ter nagedachtenis aan hun eigen levenloos geboren kind. Bij het monument ‘Een glimlach kwam voorbij’ in Sittard wordt jaarlijks tevens een herdenkingsceremonie georganiseerd met een grote inbreng van ouders. De bijeenkomst is ook bedoeld als een bijeenkomst van lotgenoten, waar men elkaar kan treffen om van gedachten te wisselen en voor onderlinge steun.

Rond de beide spoorwegmonumenten worden geen jaarlijkse herdenkingsceremonies georganiseerd. Op het Harmelen monument zijn de namen van alle slachtoffers gegraveerd en de nabestaanden worden op die manier uitgenodigd tot individuele herdenking. Het Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen blijkt minder uit te nodigen tot individuele herdenking, mogelijk vanwege de neutrale plaats en de algemene vorm en symboliek van het monument.

Herdenkingshandelingen op het Digitaal Monument en Community verschillen van de andere casestudy monumenten omdat ze vooral op individuele basis blijken te worden uitgevoerd en niet altijd een ritueel karakter hebben: een ieder herdenkt op zijn of haar eigen wijze, plaats en tijd. Bijvoorbeeld door het schrijven van een verhaal over een bepaald slachtoffer en dit op de Community website te plaatsen, door middel van het uploaden van foto's, door naar een bepaald slachtoffer te zoeken of door alleen maar te 'browsen' door de geweldige hoeveelheid informatie die er te vinden is.

Dit onderzoek laat zien dat veel deelnemers, zelfs na 'al die jaren', grote moeite hebben met hun emoties vanwege de gebeurtenissen uit het verleden. De Nederlandse psycholoog Nico Frijda noemt dit fenomeen de 'Wet van Behoud van Emotioneel Momentum'. Volgens Frijda behouden emotionele feiten en gebeurtenissen hun 'kracht' om emoties weer op te roepen en maakt het niet uit hoe lang geleden deze feiten en gebeurtenissen zich hebben voorgedaan. Door regelmatige blootstelling zouden deze emoties minder frequent kunnen opkomen en ook minder heftig kunnen worden. Dit wordt vooral geïllustreerd in de casestudy rond monumenten voor levenloos geboren kinderen. Veel deelnemende ouders aan het onderzoek geven aan dat ze nog steeds zeer emotioneel waren over het verlies van hun kind en ook over alle gebeurtenissen van destijds eromheen en erna. Rituele herdenkingshandelingen rond een monument blijken een belangrijke functie en betekenis te hebben met betrekking tot deze emoties.

Derde aspect: individuele en maatschappelijke context

Ten aanzien van de analyse van de impact van de individuele en sociale context op de oprichting van 'uitgestelde' monumenten, wordt in deze studie gebruik van de concepten over herinnering en plaats van de Amerikaanse filosoof Edward Casey.

Casey's 'model' van individuele, sociale, collectieve en publieke herinnering refereert aan een transfer, een overgang, van de individuele en private herinnering naar het publieke herinneringsdomein. In de diverse casestudy's komt naar voren dat, en hoe, monumenten worden gebruikt als een 'vehikel' bij deze transfer van de privésfeer naar het publieke domein. Met betrekking tot de in de casestudy's onderzochte monumenten geldt dat bepaalde herinneringen om uiteenlopende redenen, lange tijd in de privésfeer zijn gehouden. Door verandering van omstandigheden in zowel de individuele als de sociale en maatschappelijke context, voelen individuen of groepen met een gezamenlijke herinnering zich nu wél geroepen tot deze transfer en daarbij maken zij gebruik van de oprichting van een monument in het publieke domein.

Een individuele herinnering heeft betrekking op de persoon zelf die herinnert, op de individuele context van die persoon. Casey is van mening dat elke individuele herinneringsactiviteit beïnvloed wordt door aspecten uit de sociale en maatschappelijke context. Na de Tweede Wereldoorlog trokken bijvoorbeeld veel voormalige gevangenen van Ravensbrück zich met hun herinneringen terug in de private sfeer en namen zij niet, of zeer beperkt, deel aan publieke herdenkingsceremonies. Gedurende de reconstructie van Nederland in de direct naoorlogse periode werd niet veel aandacht besteed aan de relevantie en

impact van rituele herdenkingshandelingen met betrekking tot de verwerking van emotievolle gebeurtenissen. Vanuit de sociale context was er tot midden jaren zeventig van de vorige eeuw weinig aandacht voor het lot van de slachtoffers of voor het lot van de overlevenden en herdacht men meer in algemene zin. Dezelfde conclusie kan getrokken worden ten aanzien van de sociale context van ouders van levenloos geboren kinderen en van mensen die betrokken waren bij de ramp bij Harmelen.

Casey stelt dat de primaire 'locus' van de herinnering zich niet alleen in het lichaam of in de geest bevindt maar in een intersubjectieve verbinding die tegelijkertijd sociaal en collectief is. Dit kan worden geïllustreerd aan de hand van de bevindingen rond het monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück. Vanaf de jaren zeventig van de vorige eeuw begonnen voormalige gevangenen van Ravensbrück deel te nemen aan jaarlijkse herdenkingsceremonies bij hun eigen monument. Het gezamenlijk met voormalige mede gevangenen bijwonen van deze herdenkingen, waardoor individuele herinneringen worden gedeeld, wordt omschreven als een belangrijke functie en betekenis van het monument. Het delen van herinneringen niet alleen met anderen die ook een emotionele betrokkenheid hebben, maar ook met een publiek daar nog buiten, wordt van groot belang geacht en als functie en betekenis van monumenten gevonden in de andere casestudy's. De exploraties in de verschillende casestudy's staven de beweringen van Casey omtrent de verwevenheid van individuele en sociale herinnering.

Casey bespreekt de 'kracht' van monumenten en beschouwt ze als openbare vehikels van de private herinnering. De onderzochte monumenten blijken in dit opzicht effectieve vehikels van herinnering te zijn. Ze zijn behulpzaam bij de transfer van de private naar de publieke ruimte van herinneringen uit een verleden toen zowel de individuele als de sociale context een barrière vormden om bepaalde herinneringen openbaar te maken.

Vierde aspect: betekenis en functie van het monument voor mensen die zich nauw verbonden voelen met het monument

Een belangrijk onderdeel in het veldwerk rond de onderzochte monumenten betreft de exploratie van de functie en betekenis voor mensen die zich nauw verbonden voelen met deze monumenten.

Het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück

Ten tijde van de oprichting van het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück was het monument bedoeld om een belangrijke herdenkingsfunctie te hebben. Het monument was tegelijk ook bedoeld om te functioneren als een waarschuwing tegen de gevaren van nieuwe vormen van fascisme. Volgens de deelnemers aan dit onderzoek heeft deze laatste functie aan betekenis ingeboet.

De betekenis van het monument is in het onderzoek aan de orde gekomen in de context van de jaarlijkse herdenking bij het monument op het Museumplein in Amsterdam. Deze herdenkingsceremonie kan worden geduid als een algemeen en gezamenlijk herdenkingsritueel. De focus van de ceremonie ligt nog altijd op de vrouwen die destijds hebben deelgenomen aan het verzet tegen de Duitse overheersing. Sommigen van de voormalige gevangenen gaven in dit onderzoek aan dat ze wel behoefte hebben aan

meer persoonlijke accenten tijdens de herdenkingsceremonie: meer aandacht bijvoorbeeld voor het lot destijds van de mannen, of het kunnen inbrengen van bepaalde Joodse herdenkingsrituelen. Vanaf 2000 is inderdaad aan deze wens tegemoet gekomen, maar er blijft behoefte aan meer ‘ruimte’ om deze accenten te benadrukken. Dit zal waarschijnlijk ook in de toekomst onderwerp van discussie blijven.

De sociale betekenis van het Monument Vrouwen van Ravensbrück blijkt vooral uit het belang dat de voormalige gevangenen hechten aan het gezamenlijk herdenken en herinneringen ophalen op een bepaalde dag en plaats, in dit geval bij het monument, voor, tijdens en na de herdenkingsceremonie. De triade van plaats, monument en ritueel wordt door de meeste deelnemers aan dit onderzoek gewaardeerd. Echter, niet alle elementen van deze triade worden gelijkelijk gewaardeerd: sommigen waarderen het samenzijn met lotgenoten meer dan het monument of het ritueel.

Ook de tweede generatie met een emotionele betrokkenheid bij Ravensbrück is van mening dat in de toekomst de triade van plaats, monument en ritueel hun betekenis zal blijven behouden.

Het Digitaal Monument en de Community

De eerste generatie betrokkenen bij de Shoah beschouwt het Digitaal Monument als de ‘ware vorm’ van herdenken van de slachtoffers. Veel deelnemers aan dit onderzoek waren bij de ontwikkeling van het monument betrokken door middel van het aanvullen en corrigeren van namen en andere gegevens. Zij aarzelen over de waarde en het nut van de Community. Het Digitaal Monument wordt beschouwd als een vervanging en functioneert als het ware als een begraafplaats: het bezoeken van de website van het Digitaal Monument wordt gezien als het brengen van een bezoek aan een begraafplaats, een plaats om naar toe te gaan en waar men kan herdenken.

Gedurende een lange tijd na de oorlog had deze eerste generatie veel moeite in het delen van hun persoonlijke herinneringen met anderen. Het Digitaal Monument en de Community lijken voor deze eerste generatie een functie te hebben met betrekking tot het verwerken van emoties: men geeft aan dat het leveren van een bijdrage, bijvoorbeeld door het uploaden van een (persoonlijk levens-) verhaal, werkt bij het omgaan met veelal onverwerkte emoties en dat er een ‘helend’ effect optreedt wanneer men uiteindelijk langdurig privaat gehouden herinneringen overbrengt naar het publieke domein, in dit geval naar een virtuele plaats.

Onder de tweede en derde generatie deelnemers aan dit onderzoek blijkt dit ‘helende’ effect ook op te treden. Het wordt bovendien vooral gewaardeerd dat er zoveel ruimte is voor individuele input aan de herinnerings- en herdenkingscultuur rond de Shoah, in het bijzonder met betrekking tot het lot van de Nederlandse Joodse slachtoffers. De positieve werking van deze coproductie van herinnering mede bereikt door de mogelijkheden die de Community biedt. Het wordt van belang geacht dat men binnen de Community met elkaar in contact kan treden. De activiteiten die binnen de Community worden verricht worden gezien als het leveren van een bijdrage aan de familie geschiedenis en ook, in een meer algemene zin, als het leveren van een bijdrage aan de geschiedenis van de Shoah.

Het Digitaal Monument en Community worden niet gezien als een vervanging van de meer traditionele vorm van herdenken, bijvoorbeeld door middel van een jaarlijkse ceremonie bij een monument. Ze

worden beschouwd als een waardevolle aanvulling op de traditionele herdenkingsrituelen, een plaats die vierentwintig uur per dag toegankelijk is voor herdenking, waar ook ter wereld en waar een ieder op eigen tijd en plaats kan herdenken.

Het Digitaal Monument en Community blijken in deze zin, voor nu en in de toekomst, een zinvolle functie en betekenis te hebben als een zogenaamd ‘levend’ en ‘open’ monument waar vooral individuele herdenkingsrituelen uitgevoerd kunnen worden.

Levenloos geboren kinderen

Veel ouders blijken het verlies van hun levenloos geboren kind nog niet te hebben verwerkt voordat ze betrokken raakten bij de oprichting van een monument, of bij een herdenkingsritueel bij een monument voor levenloos geboren kinderen.

Ouders van levenloos geboren kinderen geven aan baat te hebben bij een openbare plaats waar men actief kan zijn met onverwerkte emoties rond het verlies van hun levenloos geboren kind. Een monument, of een teruggevonden graf van een levenloos geboren kind, kan in dit opzicht een nuttige functie vervullen.

Daarnaast kunnen deze monumenten ook een functie hebben bij het in het reine komen met de vaak respectloze wijze waarop er destijds werd omgegaan met levenloos geboren kinderen, bijvoorbeeld door zorgverleners of door de vertegenwoordigers van de Rooms-Katholieke kerk.

Veel ouders maken zich nog steeds zorgen over wat er destijds met hun levenloos geboren kinderen is gebeurd en vooral vraagt men zich af waar ze zijn begraven. Ze blijven zoeken naar de antwoorden op deze vragen en zoeken naar een plek waar, in termen van Casey, ‘the past could revive and survive’.

Sommige ouders hebben de plaats gevonden waar hun kind destijds werd begraven. Anderen waren hier niet toe in staat, bijvoorbeeld omdat hun kind werd gecremeerd, of omdat het patiëntendossier is vernietigd en de gegevens niet meer zijn terug te vinden. Een monument blijkt een vervangende plaats te kunnen bieden voor rituele herdenkingshandelingen. Uit het onderzoek blijkt dat deze handelingen bij een monument helpen bij het verwerken van het verlies waarbij het niet uit lijkt te maken hoe lang geleden het kind levenloos werd geboren.

Het Harmelen monument

Uit het onderzoek blijkt dat volgens sommige betrokkenen bij de treinramp bij Harmelen, het Landelijk Monument Spoorwegongevallen een waardevolle bijdrage levert aan hun rituele herdenkingshandelingen van de ramp bij Harmelen. Echter, andere betrokkenen bij deze treinramp geven aan dat zij in dit opzicht juist behoefte hebben aan een monument, uitsluitend bedoeld ter herdenking van de ramp bij Harmelen. Men vindt het belangrijk de plek waar de treinramp destijds plaats vond, te markeren met een monument. Het monument voor de treinramp bij Harmelen, in de directe nabijheid van de plaats van de ramp, heeft vooral een functie en betekenis als een plaats van (publieke) erkenning en herdenking van wat daar op die plek zich heeft afgespeeld, nu meer dan vijftig jaar geleden.

‘Uitgestelde’ monumenten en hun functie en betekenis

In deze studie staan de verschijningsvorm, context en de functie en betekenis van ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten in Nederland centraal.

Er kunnen drie aspecten worden genoemd die van invloed zijn op het nemen van een initiatief tot de oprichting van een uitgesteld monument. Een eerste aspect betreft de hedendaagse verhoogde belangstelling in langdurig weggedrukte en genegeerde herinneringen bij individuen of bij groepen van individuen wiens geschiedenis lange tijd genegeerd of verborgen is gebleven. Een tweede aspect dat een rol speelt is de verhoogde aandacht in onze maatschappij voor trauma's, rouw- en verliesverwerking, verzoening en excuus en een derde aspect betreft de toename in de belangstelling voor familiegeschiedenissen.

Dit onderzoek illustreert dat er een grotere maatschappelijke acceptatie is van gebeurtenissen en plaatsen die in het verleden taboe waren. Daarnaast is er sprake van een verhoogde snelheid van ‘sanctificatie’ van plaatsen van trauma ofwel van plekken des onheils. Deze combinatie kan leiden tot de oprichting van ‘uitgestelde’ monumenten.

Een grotere interesse in familiegeschiedenissen en familie verhalen, dit gecombineerd met het aspect van het belang van de identiteit van daarvoor anoniem geëerde en herdachte slachtoffers, kan leiden tot het ontwerpen van nieuwe vormen van monumenten met een focus op individuele herdenking en individuele rituele herdenkingshandelingen.

De publieke ruimte biedt tegenwoordig plaats aan talrijke mogelijkheden tot deelname aan herdenkingen van een brede range van gebeurtenissen. In de Nederlandse monumentencultuur heeft dit geleid tot een ‘bottom-up’ proces van initiëring en oprichting van monumenten ten aanzien van een breed spectrum aan gebeurtenissen.

Het onderzoek laat zien dat monumenten afhankelijk zijn van de ‘ontvangst’ van het monument door het publiek. De betekenis die wordt toegekend aan het monument is een belangrijk element in deze interactie en is in dit onderzoek ten aanzien van direct betrokkenen onderzocht. In het bijzonder is de rituele receptie van het monument van belang: een monument krijgt betekenis door middel van rituele herdenkingshandelingen, ofwel gedurende de meer traditionele herdenkingsceremonies ofwel door middel van meer individueel gerichte herdenkingsrituelen bij een monument.

Frijda beschrijft dat mensen die in het verleden diep geraakt zijn, baat kunnen hebben bij herdenkingsrituelen en dat deze kunnen helpen bij het verwerken van diepgevoelde emoties. Uit dit onderzoek blijkt dat deelname aan een rituele herdenkingshandeling bij een ‘uitgesteld’ monument, hetzij collectief, hetzij individueel, behulpzaam kan zijn bij de verwerking van emoties.

As times goes by you will see
That we are going to be free...⁹³⁸

⁹³⁸ From the song ‘A simple game’ (1968) by the British rock group The Moody Blues.

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